

Göttingen Series in
Social and Cultural Anthropology

Jannik Schritt

Crude Moves

Political Power in Oil-Age Niger



Göttingen University Press

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Jannik Schritt

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Cover picture: The guarded VIP area in front of the stage at the opening ceremony of Niger's first oil refinery (Photo: Jannik Schritt)



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For Juna

Contents

Acknowledgements	11
Note on Sponsors and Working Institution	12
Note on Copyright	13
Foreword	15
Introduction	17
Oil-Age Niger	21
The Focus of the Book and the Research Questions.....	23
Rentier States and the Resource Curse	26
Politics and the State in Africa.....	27
An Anthropology of Oil and Politics	30
Methodology	32
The Argument of the Book and an Overview of the Chapters.....	33
1 Uranium-Age Niger	37
1.1 The Military Conquest of Niger.....	38
1.2 After WWI: Niger During the Classic Period of Colonial Rule.....	39
1.3 After WWII: Towards a New Order in Niger	40
1.4 The Creation of the Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes (OCRS).....	43
1.5 Niger's Independence Process and the Emergence of the Authoritarian Period.....	45
1.6 The Democratic Transition: Changing the Rules of the Game in Niger.....	48
1.7 Maintaining the Social Peace	50
1.8 Conclusion.....	53

2	Narrating Oil.....	55
2.1	The Rule of Mamadou Tandja (1999–2010).....	56
2.1.1	The Origins of <i>Tazartché</i>	57
2.1.2	Reactions against <i>Tazartché</i>	63
2.2	The Term of Salou Djibo (2010–2011).....	66
2.3	The Term of Mahamadou Issoufou (from 2011).....	70
2.4	Conclusion.....	73
3	Talking Oil.....	75
3.1	Engaging on the Public Political Stage.....	76
3.1.1	The <i>Élus Locaux</i> in Zinder.....	76
3.1.2	Dan Dubai and the MPPAD.....	78
3.1.3	CRAS.....	80
3.1.4	Non-Publics.....	82
3.2	Talking Politics in the Language of Oil.....	83
3.2.1	Anticipating the Fuel Price Fix.....	84
3.2.2	Debating the Prospects of the Oil Refinery.....	88
3.2.3	(Unaired) Subaltern Voices.....	91
3.3	Conclusion.....	93
4	Rioting Oil.....	95
4.1	Dan Dubai’s Arrest.....	97
4.2	The Inauguration Day.....	98
4.3	Towards Dan Dubai’s Trial.....	99
4.4	The Trial of Dan Dubai.....	100
4.5	USN Protests.....	103
4.6	Palais Riots.....	107
4.7	Redressive Politics and the Restoration of Peace.....	109
4.8	Conclusion.....	113
5	Disputing Oil.....	115
5.1	Diffa’s Oil Autochthony.....	117
5.2	Niamey’s Oil Nationalism.....	124
5.3	Conclusion.....	131

6	Oil-Age Niger	133
6.1	New Media and “Politics by Proxy” in Niger	136
6.2	Nigerien Political Machines.....	140
6.3	The Social and Political Embeddedness of Civil Society.....	142
6.4	Ethnicity and Opposition Strongholds in Nigerien Politics	145
6.5	Françafrique, Rhetorics of Neocolonialism and Conspiracy Theories	146
6.6	Islam, Islamic Reform Movements and Religious Coexistence in Niger	148
6.7	Waithood, Violence and Patriarchy.....	150
6.8	Conclusion.....	152
	Conclusion	155
	Rents	157
	Significations	159
	Materiality	161
	Temporality	162
	References	165
	Appendix.....	185
	Figures.....	185
	Table on History of Oil Companies in Niger	186
	Acronyms	188
	Hausa Terms.....	190

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Foreword

In the realm of global affairs, Niger has often lingered on the fringes of international attention throughout its history. However, the coup d'état on July 26, 2023, thrust Niger into the global spotlight. The military coup of that day not only raised concerns for Western powers, putting at risk their crucial strategic alliance in the Sahel for counterterrorism and managing irregular migration, but also highlighted Niger's crucial role as a major uranium supplier for the West, notably France, and its emergence as an oil state.

On that day, General Abdourahamane Tchiani, commander of the presidential guard, deposed President Mohamed Bazoum, giving rise to the Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie (CNSP), a military junta led by Tchiani himself. This event triggered a regional crisis, with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) initially contemplating military intervention to reinstate Bazoum. To the surprise of many Western governments, diplomats, and journalists, a significant portion of Niger's population rallied in support of the junta. The junta's anti-Western stance played a crucial role in gaining public support and stabilizing the emerging regime. For the predominantly youthful urban population that took to the streets, the call for reshaping relations with the West overshadowed the preservation of a multi-party system, which was internationally perceived as democratically legitimate but had long since lost its legitimacy in their eyes.

Amid the uncertainty following the coup, speculation about the intricate interplay between oil and political dynamics intensified. Suspicions within Bazoum's inner circle targeted former President Mahamdou Issoufou and his son, Mahamane Sani Mahamadou, known as "Abba", who served as the oil minister under Bazoum. Speculation pointed to a potential collaboration between Issoufou and his former confidant, General Tchiani. Central to these conjectures was the controversial issue of an anticipated oil windfall. With the projected commissioning of a pipeline from Niger to the coast of Benin in 2024, expectations rose for a substantial increase in oil production to 110,000 barrels per day, with 90,000 earmarked for export – a significant jump from the existing 20,000 barrels. Although oil had previously contributed less than 5% to Niger's GDP, authorities envisioned its share rising to 25% of GDP and almost half of tax revenues. In response to this changing landscape, the government planned to establish a state-owned company, PétroNiger, to manage oil, sparking a conflict between Oil Minister Abba and President Bazoum over control of the company. Bazoum sought to reassert authority over the newfound windfall, leading to accusations that Issoufou and his "clan" masterminded the coup, vehemently denied by Issoufou himself.

While I have provided more detailed coverage of the coup in interviews for newspapers and podcasts (Ihnatenko, August 30, 2023; Carayol, September 18, 2023; Tillmanns, October 10, 2023a, 2023b), this book systematically unravels the intricate web of uranium, oil, and politics in Niger. It delves into the historical sedimentation of the country's socio-political configuration that culminated in the events of July 26, 2023. Through a nuanced examination of the international, national, regional, and local landscapes, the book navigates the power struggles that have shaped Niger's contemporary socio-political configuration, placing the coup within the context necessary for a broader understanding. I hope that reading the book will clarify that the coup, though its timing may have been surprising, continues within the logics of political dynamics in Niger.

Göttingen, December 2023

Jannik Schritt

Introduction

SOS GHOST TOWN – LET’S BOYCOTT THE ARRIVAL OF THE PRESIDENT BY STAYING AT HOME – LET’S SACRIFICE THE DAY OF THE ARRIVAL BY FASTING (AZOUMI) TO BEG GOD TO FORCE OUR LEADERS TO HAVE MERCY ON HIS PEOPLE.¹

While waiting for my research assistant, Papa, to pick me up on the morning of the inauguration, on 28 November 2011, I received this text message² calling on the people to make Zinder a “ghost town”. The message was one of several circulated prior to the inauguration which named oil-related grievances, attacked the incumbent government of new President Mahamadou Issoufou (since March 2011), and called on the population to resist and fight.

When Papa arrived and we got into the car to drive to the festival site, he covered his face with a tagelmust³, leaving only his eyes visible. I was puzzled, as one normally wraps a tagelmust around the face either as a marker of identity or to protect against wind-born sand. Without having to be asked, Papa explained that he was concealing his face to avoid being recognized, as others may think he was going against the

¹ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 28 November 2011, translated from French.

² I have translated the mobile phone messages as closely as possible from the originals in Hausa or French. However, while the original messages typically contained a number of abbreviations to keep them short, I have written the translations in full for the sake of clarity. If there are errors or brackets (), these are citations from the original messages. The text inside square brackets [], however, have been inserted for clarity.

³ Worn by men from different ethnic groups in Niger including Tuareg, Tubu, Fulani, Hausa or Songhai, a tagelmust is a garment that looks like a veil and a turban combined.



Figure 0.1: The entrance to the festival site. Photo: Jannik Schritt.

declared boycott of the political opposition and was eager to welcome President Issoufou. Indeed, he claimed that no one in Zinder supported Issoufou or his political party, the Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme (PNDS-Tarayya). Rather, he stressed, Zinder was the stronghold of the political opposition, especially of the Convention Démocratique et Sociale (CDS-Rahama) led by Mahamane Ousmane. Papa explained that the *Zindérois* also supported former President and leader of the Mouvement National pour une Société de Développement (MNSD-Nassara) Mamadou Tandja (1999–2010). Through his political decision to build the oil refinery in Zinder region, Tandja was represented (and widely received) as ending the eastern region’s historical and political marginalization by the capital Niamey situated in the far west.

Along the route to the inauguration, people lined the roadside, waving in support of the cars heading to the inauguration. After Papa had just asserted that no one in Zinder supported the new government, I was surprised to see so many people on the streets. The people, he claimed, were “villagers” who the governor had brought into Zinder on trucks to stage public support for the president, as no *Zindérois* would dare to do so. Quite the contrary, he said, he had already received the information that a large group of youth had tried to disturb the president’s official arrival at the airport this morning by throwing stones and insulting him. Also, youths had built and set alight tire barricades on the streets around the main bus station and had violently clashed with security forces. As the presidential procession passed through the city, people had worn t-shirts of Tandja and shouted his name, torn up pictures of

Issoufou, performed insulting gestures, and thrown stones. Finally, he stressed that the crowd along the streets was small in comparison to the foundation stone ceremony three years earlier. According to Papa, the *Zindérois* had turned out in their thousands to support then President Tandja and his campaign to change the constitution, *Tazartché*⁴. That day three years ago in 2008, wealthy Zinder businessman Dan Dubai had mobilized the Zinder crowd to demand that Tandja, in the name of the Nigerien population, to change the constitution and remain in office in order to complete the “great construction sites” that he had initiated, especially those that had made Niger an oil producer.

By the time we arrived at the fairground, people had already taken their seats. Only open to invited guests, we were first left to stand outside the fenced-off area (see figure 0.1), but were let onto the site a short time later. Nigerien music blared out of on-stage loudspeakers as we waited for the ceremony to start. A Nigerien and a Chinese animator made announcements in Hausa, French and Chinese, repeatedly mentioning and welcoming the VIPs until President Issoufou finally walked down the red carpet. With Issoufou seated, the entertainers invited the Iman to hold the opening prayer, the *Al-Fātiḥa*. Papa commented that Issoufou had brought his own marabout from Niamey, rather than calling on one from Zinder. For Papa, as for many others in Zinder, this move was incomprehensible, as many *Zindérois* consider themselves to be the most pious Muslims and therefore the most civilized citizens of Niger (see also Charlick, 2007b; Danda, 2004).

We then listened to the ceremonial speeches and performances. First, the governor of Zinder addressed the crowd. A PNDS member appointed by the central government rather than elected, the governor highlighted the government’s great efforts to address the challenges facing the Zinder region, in particular the security situation and the lack of agricultural and pastoral production. He emphasized the profitability of the petroleum sector, and how this would help to reduce youth unemployment and boost the government’s so-called “3N” program – *les Nigériens Nourrissent les Nigériens* (Nigeriens Nourish Nigeriens) – for agricultural self-sufficiency. After the governor, Chinese representatives – the chairman of the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) Jiang Jiemin and Chinese ambassador Xia Huang – talked about the friendly cooperation between China and Niger, stressing the socially responsible approach of the CNPC and the quick completion of the integrated oil project, and emphasizing that Chinese friendship and development cooperation came without any conditions, and was guided by one, single goal: to enhance the development capacity of Niger.

Finally, Nigerien oil and energy minister Fomokoye Gado spoke, stressing that Niger’s entrance into the circle of oil producers – the oil-age – was a historic moment. He reminded the audience of the history of oil exploration in Niger, which had started in 1958, with the first wells drilled by a French company in the 1960s. He also reminded the audience that in 2006 Esso and Petronas had abandoned oil exploration

⁴ The term *tazarce* comes from the Hausa language and is written *Tazartché* in French. It could be translated as “prolongation” or “continuation”.

in Niger, judging that it would not be profitable in the context of low world oil prices. But with the increase in oil prices in 2007, dozens of multinational oil companies had again shown interest in Niger's oil. In 2008, CNPC won the tender, agreeing to construct an oil refinery and a pipeline connecting the upstream and downstream oil industry inside the country in only three years. Gado then turned to oil revenues, their paradoxical effects, and the threats that they may pose – intensifying inequality, engendering frustration, and even civil war. He went on to explain the phenomenon of the rentier economy, in which the profits only come to serve a minority, and the social peace of the country starts to dissolve, with many “deviations” starting to develop: corruption, the distribution of public markets for money laundering, the emergence of mafia-like networks of letter box companies intervening in the petroleum sector, pre-financing activities in anticipation of an inflow of petroleum cash, unjust enrichment through false vouchers in the redistribution of petro-dollars, inefficient petroleum contracts, and unwarranted changes to the constitution. To avoid falling into such a trap, which he said had already started to develop – a reference to Tandja's regime and his campaign for constitutional change *Tazartché* – he stressed the importance of good governance and transparency in the resource sector, proudly declaring Niger's adherence to the principles of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) since March 2011.

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

At around 1 pm, the three-hour ceremony was over, and we made our way back to Zinder. Back in Zinder in the early afternoon, the events surrounding the president's arrival were already on everyone's lips. Having missed the morning protests myself, I was finally able to walk through the city to the main bus station and the central roundabouts, and to see the remnants of the protests firsthand. I then visited the radio stations to get their views and collected their reports on the day. The private radio stations reported extensively on the youth protests rather than on the inauguration ceremony itself. According to the director of Zinder community radio station Alternative Espace Citoyen (AEC), commonly referred to as Alternative, the protests related back to Tandja's *Tazartché* campaign for constitutional change. The director argued that Tandja had not told the population the truth about the oil contracts but had rather focused on making promises that could not be kept about jobs, wealth, a low fuel price, and much more. Tandja's promises had created the illusion of prosperity that the new government of Issoufou could not fulfil.

Returning to my guest house, I switched on the television. The state television channel Office du Radiodiffusion Télévision du Niger (ORTN) report focused exclusively on the festive character of the event, making no mention of the protests. From the president's arrival at the airport, they only showed clips of Issoufou's supporters, leaving out the protestors. During the ceremony, they closely framed the stage to avoid showing images of the small crowd. As I switched off the television to go to bed, I received another short message, this one mocking *Zaki* ["the lion"]⁵:

Scandal in Zinder: The head of state has lost his value to Nigeriens. This morning, the president and the delegation that accompanied him were made unwelcome in Zinder. The Zindérois population criticized, insulted and threw stones at the presidential procession, destroyed official vehicles, and shouted: we want Papa Tandja back. A real sabotage of the opening ceremony for zaki. Please, send this information to your brothers and sisters. It is your right. This is freedom of expression. ⁶

Oil-Age Niger

The 2011 inauguration of the refinery ushered in a new, long-anticipated era in Niger, the oil-age. In June 2008, the Tandja government had signed a contract with CNPC to produce oil from the Agadem block in the Eastern Rift Basin and to build a refinery near Zinder (see figure 0.2). Like other Sahel-Saharan countries, despite evidence to suggest significant reserves, with its land-locked position and harsh environment limiting profitability, Niger had long remained underexplored in the quest for new oil reserves (Augé 2011). From 1958 onward, inspired by major discoveries in neighboring Algeria two years previous, primarily French and American oil companies had been exploring for oil in Niger. Although the first positive results became known in Nigerien political circles, and at least among segments of the broader public by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the oil remained in what Witte (2017) calls a "state of not-yet-ness" – a state of expectation and waiting. This not-yet-ness would last over three decades.

Rather than fulfilling the promise of oil production, postcolonial Niger became inextricably entangled with French uranium production. This entanglement laid the foundation for autocratic regimes which were to follow independence in 1960 and would remain until the democratic transition in the early 1990s (van Walraven 2009). From its inception, French colonial policy had systematically marginalized eastern Nigeriens and other ethnic groups (especially in the perception of Hausa from Zinder)

⁵ *Zaki* is a name given to Issoufou by his political comrades to showcase his political competence (Abdouramane 2015).

⁶ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 28 November 2011, translated from French.

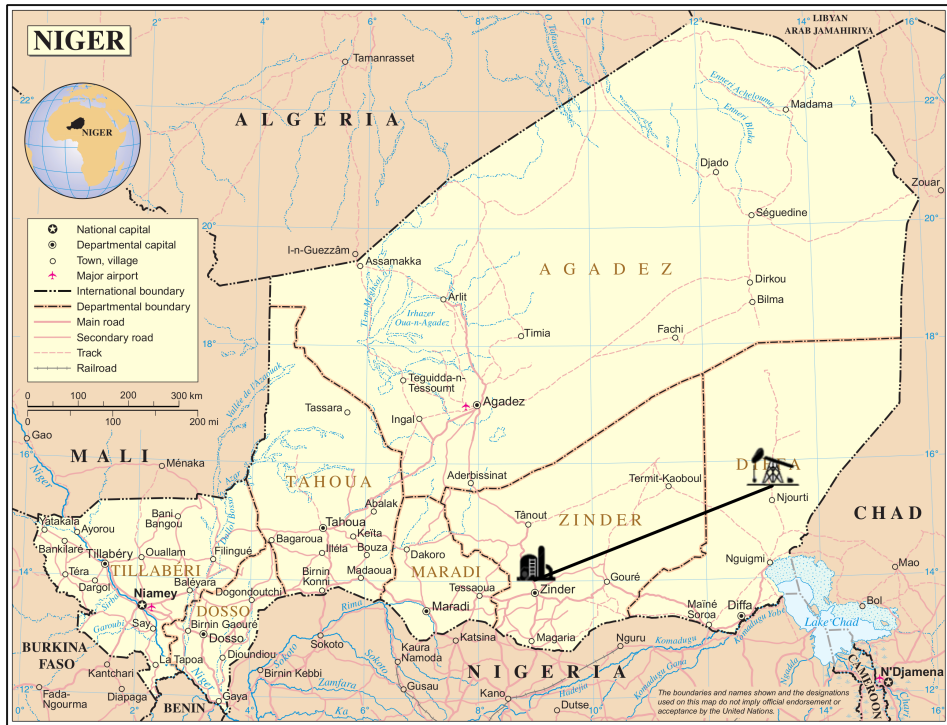


Figure 0.2: Oil production in Niger. Source: own illustration based on United Nations map.

in favor of western Nigeriens and Zarma ethnicity. This trend continued after independence, with Zarma constituting the political elite of the country until the National Conference and the transition to democracy in 1991 (Ibrahim 1994).

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

Like in other new African oil states, an increasing international competition for oil had enlarged the Nigerien government's agency to sign a production sharing agreement with the CNPC in 2008 (Hicks 2015). At the oil refinery's foundation stone ceremony in Zinder in late 2008, the political entourage of then Nigerien president Tandja (MNSD-Nassara) launched *Tazartché* (Hausa for "continuation" or "continuity"), a campaign to change the constitution to allow his re-election. Youths wearing pro-*Tazartché* t-shirts and waving placards were mobilized to welcome Tandja. In the national *Tazartché* narrative, in bringing oil production to Niger, Tandja had finally succeeded where others had failed. Moreover, himself from further east in Diffa, Tandja had won support by opting to build the refinery in Zinder, a region and a population that had always felt marginalized by and dissatisfied with national politics in the capital Niamey.

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

The Focus of the Book and the Research Questions

Using in-depth ethnographic material collected over 13 months of fieldwork from 2011 to 2014 and following events until the time of writing within the methodological framework of the extended case method (Burawoy 1998; van Velsen 1967; Burawoy 2014), the refinery's inauguration becomes this book's point of departure from which I extend out to the historical processes that made it possible: first, to the colonial and postcolonial entanglements in the quest for Niger's natural resources (chapter 1) and then, to political conflicts that were played out on the public stage of the country's presidency after the signing of the oil contract in 2008 (chapter 2). From an ethnographic perspective, I then explore in detail the protest cycle of a "political drama" (Swartz, Turner, and Tuden 1966) around the oil refinery's inauguration: from the mobilization of political capital (chapter 3), to a showdown, into a crisis, mechanisms of redress, and the restoration of peace (chapter 4). In the chapter that is following, I compare the public controversies around the oil refinery in Zinder with public controversies along other parts of the infrastructure of oil in Niger – the oil wells in the far eastern region of Diffa and the storage facilities and petrol stations in

the capital Niamey situated in the west of the country (chapter 5). In the last chapter, I abstract to the historically sedimented and fragmented socio-political order of oil-age Niger (chapter 6). In the conclusion, I finally discuss the relationship between oil and politics.

The main focus of this book is to distinguish between politics and society preexisting oil production and the political and socio-cultural transformation induced by oil. To answer this question, I combine ethnographic analysis with a practice theoretical and processual perspective to focus on the process of Niger entering the oil-age, the making of its oil infrastructure, and the forms of political contestation and resistance that emerged along the infrastructure. Adopting a historical perspective, I show how politics and society in pre-oil Niger were inextricably entangled with uranium production in the north of the country. Understanding uranium-age Niger prior to the beginning of oil production is important for analyzing the transformations induced by oil. The historical juncture of Niger becoming a new oil producer thereby offers the unique opportunity to analyze the political and socio-cultural transformation processes induced by oil production in real time.

As the study of oil has been an important topic in economics and political science for several decades and an anthropology of oil has only recently begun to emerge (Behrends, Reyna, and Schlee 2011), the question arises: “What (More) Can Anthropologists Contribute to the Study of Oil?” (Behrends and Schareika 2010). As such, most research on oil has only been able to look at the socio-political effects of oil several years or even decades after the start of production. For these researchers then, I contend, it has been difficult to distinguish between oil-induced effects and other causes of social, political and economic change. That is, in looking retrospectively at oil induced change without having a clear understanding of a society prior to oil may lead authors to see oil everywhere. Along with the rentier state perspective, Schubert (2016, 2017), for example, qualifies oil to be the cause of a “culture of immediatism” in post-war Angola. One of his main examples for such a culture of rent-seeking, complicity and co-optation is the relationships of young girls with rich and old “sugar daddies” (ibid.). But is this not a near universal phenomena in Africa? At least in Niger, it is one of the main grievances of young men unable to find a partner to marry even before oil production had started. Moreover, many approaches consider the production of new orders either from a macro-perspective, which has the disadvantage of describing the relationship of abstract entities such as indicators for conflict, governance, economic growth and so on that are themselves the result of dynamic processes, or from a historical *longue durée* perspective, which is based on fragmentary information and deduced from social theory. To understand how oil is productive of new orders, an ethnographic and anthropological approach can complement the established macro perspectives which dominate economics, political science and historical research by analyzing transformation processes in the making, and by capturing internal dynamics from within (Behrends and Schareika 2010).

In their programmatic article, Behrends and Schareika (2010:86) call for more ethnographies of oil production, arguing that “an anthropological study of oil should

not only take up and make use of frameworks set by political economy, but use its particular theoretical and methodological strengths to develop new perspectives in this increasingly important field". This illustrates two important points for any anthropological study on oil: Firstly, the scientific concepts related to oil that have been well established by political science and economics should be taken as a starting point of analysis. Secondly, empirical data should be gathered using ethnographic and anthropological methodology. In doing so, ethnographic and anthropological approaches should not simply fill in the gaps of the resource curse framework with social details, but instead aim to reconfigure the approach (Gilberthorpe and Rajak 2017:3).

Developing such an approach, I argue that to understand the impact of oil on politics and society in Niger, we have to situate the oil refinery's inauguration temporally and contextually. In doing so, I show how the beginning of oil production in Niger was incorporated into an already established political game, where oil acted as an idiom, framing pre-existing political conflicts in the language of oil (see also Watts 2004:71). Nevertheless, the processual development of these conflicts also transformed the political configuration through new alliances, cooptation and repression. Taken together, I argue that oil acts as a catalyst that accelerates pre-existing dynamics, slowly transforming the socio-political configuration in which it operates in the process. Against the backdrop of a longer history of uranium extraction, development aid and French interventions in Niger, we thereby come to understand how oil production fosters new connections and forms of agency, yet also reproducing political and economic relationships that limit possibilities for radical change (see also Gustafson 2020; Strønen 2017; Anthias 2018).

To fully develop my argument, I first present two competing narratives for understanding oil-induced transformations, namely the rentier state and the resource curse framework on the one hand, and the literature on neopatrimonial politics and the state in Africa on the other hand. While the resource curse framework presents clear-cut causalities on how the inflow of oil revenues transforms economy, politics and society regardless of any context, the literature on neopatrimonialism sees many of what the resource curse thesis identifies as oil-induced transformations to be rather general features of cultural politics in Africa. With these two competing narratives in mind, I ask questions about pre-oil and post-oil dynamics, thereby questioning clear-cut causalities inherent in both frameworks. I then briefly summarize the contributions from an anthropology of oil and politics to develop an approach to oil production by focusing on "political situations" (Barry 2012). My study thereby makes three main contributions: First, it provides a new contribution to the study of oil. Acknowledging the contributions of the resource curse thesis and rentier state theory for highlighting the effects of resource revenues in state-building processes, the book goes beyond a rather narrow focus of "oil as money", theorizing also on the signifiatory, infrastructural and temporal dimensions of oil. Moreover, by pointing out that context matters, the book questions the claim of these studies that oil has necessarily similar effects everywhere. Second, the book provides a new contribution to African politics and the state. Questioning the rather one-sided focus on "traditional African elements"

inherent in the paradigm of neopatrimonialism, the book takes “relational agency” of African states seriously, combining an introverted perspective of moral economy with an extroverted one of political economy. Thirdly, it provides a rich empirical and ethnographic analysis of contemporary Nigerien politics and society, giving a much-needed portrait of the historically sedimented and fragmented socio-political order of the country in times of oil and violence in the Sahel.

Rentier States and the Resource Curse

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

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

In developing his notion of the African rentier state, Yates (1996, 2012) formulated a coherent chain of causality for many of these phenomena. Of our particular interest here is the relationship between the inflow of an external oil rent and authoritarianism, conflict and corruption. According to the rentier state theory then, the inflow of oil rent creates a financially autonomous state which becomes stabilized. Based on the “no taxation, no representation” assumption, Yates’ follows that the state is able to relieve itself of internal pressures for democracy through high spending on security, cooptation and bribery. At the same time, external oil revenues establish a “rentier mentality” or a “something for nothing” reward system in which the only game left in town is the elites’ greed to pocket as much of the oil rent as possible. These causal mechanisms lead to an overall decline in state legitimacy, limited democratic participation, corruption and institutional inefficiency.

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

However, the rather unilineal and deterministic causalities predicted by the resource curse thesis and rentier state theory have by now become highly controversial in more recent economics and political science literature. There are by now contrary assertions to almost all the causal relations predicted by these theories (Basedau and Lay 2009; Haber and Menaldo 2011; Brunnschweiler and Bulte 2008; Cavalcanti, Mohaddes, and Raissi 2011; Leong and Mohaddes 2011). The conflicting results of the new resource curse studies show that even small changes in data selection, process and design of econometric regression analysis can lead to large differences in results. A recent experimental study of quantitative methods found that among seventy-three research teams that independently conducted studies of the same hypothesis with identical baseline data, there was excessive variation in results (Breznau et al. 2022). While the findings of this important study underscore the need for context-sensitive qualitative-ethnographic research, a neoliberal good governance paradigm seems to be emerging that shifts the blame away from market failures to the “poor performance” or “bad governance” of African states alone. In this paradigm, “governance” has become the most important factor in explaining the occurrence of the “resource curse”, with “good governance” becoming the solution to turn the “curse” into a “blessing” (Humphreys, Sachs, and Stiglitz 2007; Heinrich and Pleines 2012). According to the new formula, resource extraction + bad governance = poverty exacerbation can be countered by resource extraction + good governance = poverty reduction (Pegg 2005).

Politics and the State in Africa

In contrast to the resource curse, the literature on the state in Africa seems to agree that many of what the resource curse literature identifies as transformations due to oil production are rather general features of African politics (Médard 1982; Bayart 1989; Chabal and Daloz 1999).

Most commonly, academics have sought to explain these common aspects amongst African states using the neopatrimonial state model, which has become a kind of catch-all concept (Bach 2012). While pioneered by Eisenstadt (1973), Médard (1982) was the first to use the model to describe the conflation of the private and the public in African political administration. The notion of neopatrimonialism draws

explicitly on Weber's ideal types of authority and refers to the coexistence of patrimonial informal logics and formal legal-rational bureaucratic logics. In other words, the neopatrimonial model portrays African politics as a deviation from idealized modern Western democracies, these deviations being caused by traditional African elements. Chabal and Daloz (1999), for example, state that elites in Africa exploit disorder as a political instrument for personal enrichment, which they largely attribute to rational behavior in the context of a somehow opaque notion of "African culture". For them, the state is only a pseudo-Western façade masking deep personalized cultural relations. Compared to Western states, neopatrimonial perspectives see African statehood as "failed", "limited", or even a "façade". As a result, through notions such as instability, violence and informality African politics and society have been often described in the neopatrimonial paradigm as inherently disorderly while Western states through notions of stability, peace and formality have often been depicted as well-ordered (Vries and Mehler 2019).

In short, the concept of neopatrimonialism has several problems: ethnocentrism, empirical weakness, a national-container model ignoring questions of international political economy (Hauck et al. 2013), and assuming African politics and society to remain stable (A. Idrissa 2009). First, although most Africanist scholars share an understanding of African politics as characterized by a plurality of norms – private and public, formal and informal – that coexist alongside one another, based as it is on Weber's ideal types of "Western realities" and "African deviations" of these types, the neo-patrimonialist paradigm is fundamentally ethnocentric, as it fails to acknowledge that clientelism, corruption and cronyism are also part of politics in the West (although often in a different form, not so much in its petty appearance but more as high-level politico-economic entanglements). As Mkandawire (2015) has shown, the literature on neopatrimonialism bases its arguments on anecdotal evidence of corruption, most of which is taken from media reports and then extrapolated into a general statement. With such an approach, however, Western states could as well easily be classified as neopatrimonial. Second, as a catch-all concept, neopatrimonialism does not resolve the "problem of specificity" (Erdmann and Engel 2007). The concept lacks an empirically grounded concept of culture explaining the mechanisms behind clientelist structures instead of black boxing them (Olivier de Sardan 2014a). Third, the concept pursues a methodological nationalism that is blind to history and unequal international political economy (Bayart 2000). Fourth, identifying traditional African elements to cause deviations from an idealized Western model, the concept of neopatrimonialism freezes African politics and society in time, reducing society and politics to a static politico-cultural system, or what Elias (2009) had criticized as *Zustandsreduktion*, instead of focusing on transformations to reveal its dynamic character (A. Idrissa 2009).

The concept of neopatrimonialism and the neoliberal good governance paradigm are quite similar as both are highly introverted, shifting the blame for either disorder or oil's negative impacts solely to internal African affairs. Here, the formula seems to be oil + neopatrimonialism = disaster. Thereby, the important critique of extraverted perspectives on unequal international power relations becomes black-boxed.

First formulated for Africa by former president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah (1965), in the perspective of finance as neocolonialism, foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the former colonies. Rodney (1972), for example, prominently argued that “the West” has “underdeveloped” Africa, thereby however neglecting or even denying African agency. While there are several varieties of economic theories of neocolonialism such as dependency theory (Raffer and Singer 2001) or world system theory (Wallerstein 1974), theories of neocolonialism have also been extended to forms of cultural colonialization (Said 1978; Comaroff and Comaroff 2002).

However, introverted and extroverted perspectives are not incompatible but rather two sides of the same coin. Only recently, scholars have started to focus empirically on the extend of “African agency”, pointing, for example, to how African leaders instrumentalize a position of weakness in order to tap into international financial flows (Beswick and Hammerstad 2013; Fisher 2018; Lonsdale 2000; Anderson and Patterson 2017). Clapham (2004) was one of the first to note that African elites do have a certain degree of agency in instrumentalizing external agendas to their own benefit. Similarly, Bayart, whose early work *Politique du Ventre* (politics of the belly) (1989) was clearly focused on the introverted clientelist logics in Africa, has extended his analysis of African politics in his later work which is explicitly named “extraversion” (Bayart 2000). In contrast to the literature on neopatrimonialism, Bayart (2000) starts from the premise that politics in Africa are not different from politics elsewhere in the world. Rather than focusing on culture as an or the explanatory variable, theorists adopting this perspective see history and the political economy as the most important factor in explaining social inequalities, clientelism and corruption. For Bayart, one important historical trajectory of African political economy, which is said to have led to political domination, economic accumulation and conflict in African states is “a whole series of rents generated by Africa’s insertion in the international economy in a mode of dependence” (Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1999:xvi). These rents include colonial and postcolonial exploitation of natural resources such as uranium or oil, as well as external financial aid. Bayart (2000) has therefore argued that instead of being dependent on the West per se, Africa has rather made itself dependent on access these rents. However, “occasionally the puppets pull the strings” (Bayart 2009:26), when, for example, African presidents use accusations of neocolonialism to blackmail their international patrons for rents.

Taken together, whereas the resource curse paradigm mostly explains oil induced transformation by focusing on the effects of resource revenues or more particularly the oil rent, the literature on African politics and the state has often attributed the same phenomena not to oil rents but to structural dependency, culture or social norms. However, with the emerging neoliberal good governance paradigm, the literatures of the “governance curse” and African neopatrimonialism seem to be converging in that the blame is solely put on African governments. A more balanced perspective is that of “political settlement”, which seeks to use different power configurations and political imaginaries in African states to explain alternative forms of oil governance and deal-

making with international oil companies (e.g. Hickey et al. 2020). Although its analytical focus still tends to be more on the introverted side of the coin, such a perspective is more in line with an anthropology of oil and politics.

An Anthropology of Oil and Politics

Similar to resource curse and rentier state theories, major anthropological works equally focused on the production of violent oil realities (Reyna and Behrends 2011). However, going beyond the narrow focus of resource curse and rentier state theories on the effects of resource revenues, anthropological works focused on more than just the distribution of oil rents. Early on, Coronil (1997) has pointed to both the natural and imaginative dimension of oil that induced state-building processes in Venezuela. He showed how oil was used politically to create the illusion of prosperity, fetishizing and imbuing it with magical qualities. Focusing mainly on cultural production in Nigeria, Apter (2005) illustrates the “politics of illusion” at work as an attempt by the government to use oil production to help construct a national identity. This led to an unstable field of significations in which people first thought of oil as a “blessing” from God which would alleviate poverty, but that later turned into a “curse”, with oil being a sign of the Devil and of their corrupt regimes. Sawyer (2004) shows how indigenous movements against oil production and neoliberal reforms in Ecuador were as much about addressing inequality, injustice and citizenship claims as they were about the extraction and use of their subsoil resources. In looking at these anthropological works, Behrends and Schareika (2010) have therefore suggested that “signification” as a concept marks a distinctively anthropological approach to the study of oil production. Building on practice theory, they see it as theoretically and methodologically necessary for future research to study significations as coming from the social practice of signifying rather than cultural systems of meanings. In other words, they conceptualize significations as produced in, through and for processes of political negotiation between actors with opposing economic interests and varying and potentially conflicting positions of power and degrees of socio-political knowledge (Behrends and Schareika 2010).

Next to rents and significations of oil, Rogers (2015a) points to materiality and temporality as newly emerging dimensions in studying oil (see also Franquesa 2019). Temporality has been a topic in anthropological research on oil and processes of state formation. Ferry and Limbert (2008) try to explicitly theorize the temporal aspects of resources-making and resource-claiming, arguing that questions around resource discovery and its supposed ends “frame the past, present and future in certain ways; they propose or preclude certain kinds of time reckoning; they inscribe teleologies; and they are imbued with affects of time, such as nostalgia, hope, dread, and spontaneity” (ibid.:4). Focusing on conflicts in Chad before the first barrel of oil was produced, Behrends (2008) analyzed the role expectations and significations of oil might have before production started. In a similar vein, Weszkalnys (2011, 2014, 2016) for São Tomé and Príncipe and Witte (2018) for Uganda have also pointed to the import-

ance of temporality by analyzing how the absence or not-yet-ness of oil production spurred various anticipatory practices and economies of expectation.⁷ Limbert (2010) has shown how the end of oil was anticipated in Oman and how oil thus became visible again after years of unquestioned prosperity. Also, Fricke (2017) has illustrated how the uncertain future of oil in Gabon conjures up diverse histories, temporalities and affects. Beneath this temporality of pre-production, not-yet-production and post-production, resource extraction is in fact a “complex mesh of multiple temporalities: durations, rhythms and cycles – with different velocities, intensities and extensions” that actors seek to manipulate according to their own strategic interests (D’Angelo and Pijpers 2018:215). The manipulation of temporalities of extraction is also evident in Skaten’s (2017) analysis, in which the temporality of fuel production in Ghana is linked to the electoral cycle. In addition to “producing temporal narratives that support or contest such organization,” “extracting minerals or combustible substances means organizing temporal levels, speed and rhythms of production” (D’Angelo & Pijpers 2018:216). Leonard’s (2016) analysis of oil production in Chad shows that while the transnational oil industry worked at high speed in developing its facilities and production, Chadian government institutions could not keep up with this speed in managing revenues. For Leonard, this “two-speed problem” was at the heart of the failure of the World Bank-funded consortium. However, going beyond analyses that see the cause of this problem in low technical capacity in a “weak state”, she shows that the high speed was a deliberate attempt to create a kind of temporal disentanglement from the inhabitants of the oil region.

Lately, Science and Technology Studies (STS) and the “material turn” have gained high currency in anthropology. In thinking oil beyond the resource curse, these approaches seek to account for forms of agency and control contained in the materiality of the resources, and the technological as well as socio-political infrastructures surrounding oil production (Appel, Mason, and Watts 2015; Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014; Rogers 2015b), be it in relation to capital accumulation (Appel 2012a), structural violence (Appel 2012b; Murrey 2015), corporate social technologies (Rogers 2012), or transparency and ethics (Barry 2013). Mitchell (2011:5) prominently articulated the idea that “politics are engineered out of the flow of energy”. The idea serves a heuristic purpose to look at forms of agency and control that are linked to processes of extraction, transportation, distribution and consumption of oil, and thus to overcome the narrow focus of economic and political science studies on oil rents. Appel (2019) has recently focused on disentanglement from a spatial and infrastructural perspective, using the case study of Equatorial Guinea to show how the oil industry continually works to give the impression of being “offshore”, that is, operating in a detached way that is unaffected by the local context, despite the fact that the industry is not only present on land but also deeply entangled with the state. She looks at the work of abstraction, decontextualization and standardization of capitalism, offering a

⁷ Economists have therefore argued that the resource curse occurs before resources are even extracted (Frynas, Wood, and Hinks 2017).

counterbalance to the resource curse theory, which focuses more on the role of producing states rather than the oil industry. Appel shows how (global) inequalities that emerge in the analysis of oil projects are not simply deepened by the oil industry or global capitalism, but rather are constitutive of it.

The short review shows that apart from different accentuations in these works, an anthropology of oil and politics is generally characterized by a holistic and context-sensitive approach. Not only is the distribution of the oil rents important for analyzing state-building processes but so is the discursive, material and temporal dimension of its politics. Moreover, instead of assuming that oil extraction produces the same effects everywhere, Reyna and Behrends (2011) have argued for placing violent oil realities in pre-existing patterns of domination. While such an invitation to context-sensitivity takes us directly to the literature on African politics and the state, we should not conceptualize African states as national containers but in their dis/entanglements with global forces. In doing so, anthropological works have also taken into account the influence of transnational corporations, markets and supply chains in the production of citizenship, (global) inequality and capitalist formations (Reed 2009; Ferguson 2006; Shever 2012; Yessenova 2012; Breglia 2013; Schubert 2017; Adunbi 2015). Moreover, rather than adhering to the essentialization and generalization of African states often inherent in writings on neopatrimonialism, anthropologists have pointed to the heterogeneity, fragmentation, and multiple administrative layers within African states, trying to avoid normative classifications of African deviations from Western norms (Lund 2007; Olivier de Sardan 2011; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014a). Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (2014b), for example, proposed to look at the concrete practices of state institutions, bureaucracies and bureaucrats, and how their practices of “doing the state” were interwoven with representations of “seeing the state”.

Following such an approach, I do not understand African politics and society as homogeneous and static national containers but focus instead on the processual development of a historically sedimented and fragmented socio-political order (Bierschenk 2014) being characterized by both external relations of political economy and internal relations of moral economy. Developing a holistic and context-sensitive approach, I propose to combine an ethnographic focus on “political situations” (Barry 2012) with the “extended case method” of the Manchester School, rethought through practice theory, to processually track situations across time and space to arrive at an abstraction of a historically sedimented and fragmented socio-political order (Evens and Handelman 2006).

Methodology

With recourse to Barry (2012), the oil refinery’s inauguration can be understood as a “political situation”. Political situations are contested events and material-semiotic assemblages that include artefacts and technologies, as well as discursive movements of ideas – such as the resource curse thesis. He thereby understands events “not [...] as moments in time, but as points of interference between multiple trajectories, which

may generate unexpected and emergent effects, as well as new spatio-temporal relations” (Barry 2016:4). A political situation in his understanding is thus not “bounded” in local places, but rather stretches over extended periods of time and scale.

I contend that political situations can best be researched and analyzed with the extended case method originally developed by the Manchester School of Max Gluckman and his students. Here, I draw especially on Burawoy’s (1998) popular formulation of the extended case method but reformulated through practice theory (for a detailed discussion see Schritt 2019). He suggested four moments: first, extending out from being the observer to also being the participant; second, extending observations over time and space; third, extending out from the micro to the macro forces; and fourth, extending or reformulating existing theories.

Firstly, to extend from my observation of the opening ceremony to being a participant of Nigerien politics, I became a committee member in the civil society organization Comité Régional des Associations et Syndicats de la Région de Zinder (CRAS) that had just formed around the coming oil production. As a committee member, I participated in political activities around the oil refinery’s inauguration which allowed me to gather deep insights into the workings of civil society and politics in Niger (see also Schritt 2020). Secondly, extending observations over time and space, I was not only a participant observer of the whole protest cycle that unfolded around the inauguration, but I also traced the processual development of the political conflicts into time and explored the spatial connections with events that happened in Diffa and Niamey (Schritt 2018). Thirdly, extending out from the micro to the macro forces that shaped the situation, I set the introverted dynamics that I had observed and traced historically and spatially in relation to the extroverted dynamics of Niger’s political economy (Schritt 2016b, 2016a). Instead of subsuming the discontents surrounding the oil refinery’s inauguration under patterns of traditional culture, I thus arrive at a much more nuanced picture of society and politics in oil-age Niger that pays attention to both the extroverted (post)colonial history and the introverted logic of the political game. Fourthly, to extend theory, I built on “serendipity” as part of ethnographic theory building (Bajc 2012) and thereby combined an “abductive inquiry” (Peirce 1974[1933]) with “sensitizing concepts” (Blumer 1954). Abduction points to the fact that the context does not arise “*ab novo* from the facts, [but...] require[s] the prism of theory” (Burawoy 2014:968). Sensitizing concepts render phenomena visible that would otherwise remain unseen (Blumer 1954:7). I contend that the four dimensions of oil – rents, significations, materiality, temporality – are especially helpful as sensitizing concepts guiding empirical observations.

The Argument of the Book and an Overview of the Chapters

In seeking to answer how oil induces transformation processes, I conclude that oil acts as a “catalyst”, rather than as a “blessing” or a “curse”. As a catalyst, oil accelerates pre-existing social and political dynamics. This conclusion contrasts to the binary under-

standing inherent in the resource curse framework, in which oil, as either a “blessing” or a “curse”, but hardly anything in between, triggers a series of profound transformations. This understanding of oil as a catalyst goes beyond a supposed inevitability of the resource curse. But such a perspective goes also beyond culturalist perspectives on African politics and the state such as the neopatrimonialism paradigm that freezes African societies in time. Rather, I show how a historically sedimented and fragmented order emerged over time with a particular politics at play. Here, oil provides political players with new symbolic and material resources to engage in a game they are already playing. While oil thus appears as an idiom in the very moment of oil production starting as it frames pre-existing conflicts in a language of oil, the conflict dynamics ultimately change the pre-existing socio-political configuration in the course of its events. In particular, I illustrate how oil is used to make claims to power and legitimacy, build alliances, gain negotiating power, find recognition as an interest group, compete for position and a share of state revenues, and formulate visions of the future.

Following the logic of the extended case method to highlight oil-induced transformations, the case study is presented in a chronological order while the chapters also zoom in and out to highlight (spatial) connections between macro- and micro-politics.

In chapter 1 “Uranium-Age Niger”, I focus on Niger before the conclusion of the oil contract in 2008 to analyze the political configuration that pre-dated oil production. Although the search for oil started with the colonial conquest of Niger in the early 20th century, it was first groundnuts and then uranium and later also development aid, and not oil, which dominated the Nigerien postcolonial political landscape until 2008. I argue that especially the extroverted uranium-based political order in Niger has first helped an authoritarian regime to emerge until the National Conference in 1991 introduced a multi-party system. After years of authoritarian silence, this critical event changed the rules of the game in Niger to political competition, civil society activism and freedom of speech and the press. It was this context into which oil was introduced as both a new revenue source for the regime to co-opt opponents and as a new idiom for playing politics including the political opposition, civil society and the press criticizing the regime.

In chapter 2 “Narrating Oil”, I analyze macro-politics in Niger as they became visible in political disputes between the signing of the oil contract in 2008 and the opening of the oil refinery in 2011. Rather than instantly changing the rules of the political game, I argue that oil was incorporated into the pre-existing game the politicians were already playing. In particular, I examine political rhetoric of the three consecutive Nigerien Presidents – Mamadou Tandja, Salou Djibo and Mahamadou Issoufou – in relation to the coming oil production that they addressed to both international and national audiences. Studying their oil narratives and co-optation strategies, I show that the political game in Niger is characterized by a logic of code-switching between an extroverted character to gain access to international financial flows, and an introverted character focused on the redistribution of spoils, postings, and privileges.

In chapter 3 “Talking Oil”, I focus on micro-politics in Zinder directly prior to the inauguration of Niger’s first oil refinery in late 2011. I show how the immediate

presence of oil was first of all characterized by talking oil politics. In this talk, political actors invoked the resource curse thesis to question the legitimacy of their opponents through the speech acts of naming, blaming and claiming. Studying public interventions, especially radio debates, and situating the actors' oil talk according to their positions in the political arena, I reveal their personal projects. I thereby show that oil talk is enacted in a double sense. Firstly, political actors' personal agendas shape their talk and secondly, privileged access to radio is essential in becoming a potent political actor in the talk around oil. By talking oil politics, the chapter argues that oil-age Niger is not only made a social and political reality, but political difference is also reconstructed, and patterns of domination are reinforced.

In chapter 4 "Rioting Oil", I analyze the production of disorder that followed the oil refinery's inauguration in November 2011. While the previous chapter focused on the first phase of a "political drama" – the mobilization of political capital – this chapter concentrates on the crisis, the mechanisms of redress, and finally the restoration of peace that followed the showdown of the refinery's opening. This phase development helps me to identify the multiple causal relations in Nigerien politics, and to show how oil became part of the more localized, everyday political game, thereby decoding the "how" of Nigerien politics itself. Focusing on the role of influential political players and the orchestrated nature of mobile phone short messages in organizing the riots, I show how the contestations were not only "politics from below" but as much "politics from above".

In chapter 5 "Disputing Oil", I compare the contestations that emerged around the refinement of fuel in Zinder with political controversies in Diffa around the extraction of oil and in the capital Niamey around the distribution of its fuel. The event of Niger becoming a new oil producer triggered not only violent youth protests at the refinery's inauguration in Zinder in late 2011 but also in the far eastern region of Diffa in 2012 and 2013, while in 2012 peaceful demonstrations and strikes led by civil society activists and labor unions paralyzed the capital Niamey, in the west of the country. I show that the political decision to disperse the infrastructure of oil over different administrative regions produced processes of territorialization through which political, regional and ethnic differences became newly articulated. I argue that through these oil-spurred processes temporally and spatially separated histories of marginalization were stitched together to (re)produce collective identities.

In chapter 6 "Oil-Age Niger", I use the findings of the previous chapters and similar protests that increased afterwards to abstract to a more general socio-political configuration in oil-age Niger. I discuss historically accumulated patterns of politics and society through the notions of politics by proxy, Nigerien political machines, the social and political embeddedness of civil society, histories of marginalization and political opposition strongholds, (neo)colonial narratives and conspiracy theories, religious coexistence, the situation of youth, and patriarchy. I show that the logic of the Nigerien socio-political order in the moment of oil's immediate presence emerged through a processual development of sedimentation and fragmentation including relations to external political economy as well as internal moral economy.

In the conclusion, I discuss the limits of explaining Nigerien socio-political dynamics through both the notions of the resource curse and rentier state (extroversion/oil as money) and African politics and the state, especially neopatrimonialism (introversion/culture). Instead, I argue for a perspective that addresses extroverted and introverted dynamics symmetrically. Finally, summarizing the findings of the case study with regard to the four sensitizing concepts of oil that were introduced in the introduction – rents, significations, materiality and temporality – I discuss the notion of oil as an idiom (oil as significations), publics that emerged around the infrastructure of oil (oil as materiality), and talking politics in the different phases of oil production (oil as temporality). Finally, I conclude that the notion of oil as a catalyst is best suited to grasp and explain oil's multiple, various time- and space-specific effects.

1 Uranium-Age Niger

Niger's particular history of oil starts with the colonial search for natural resources in Africa in general. Even before military conquest had begun in the 1890s, the European powers had already divided the African continent on paper. The 1884–85 Berlin Conference formally partitioned Africa and provided the participating countries⁸ with the legitimacy to govern Africa politically, militarily and economically. It was primarily the French and the British who had competed for dominion over the geographic regions of the Sahara and the Central Sudan⁹, and so the areas were divided up between the two at the conference. With the 1890 Franco-British agreement, the British claimed the lion's share of the regions through a faked treaty with Sokoto Caliphate, a powerful Islamic state covering most sections of contemporary Hausaland in Nigeria (Fuglestad 1983:49). The French received all the land to the north.¹⁰

⁸ The participating countries were Germany, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden–Norway (union until 1905), the Ottoman Empire and the United States.

⁹ The Sudan as a geographic region to the south of the Sahara is not to be confounded with the African state Sudan. The geographic region stretches from Western Africa to Eastern Central Africa and is divided into the Western, Central and Eastern Sudan basins by mountain ranges. The Central Sudan denotes the region encompassing the Chad basin and the Logone River. At the time of colonial conquest, the region was characterized by large Hausa empires which mainly occupied areas of contemporary eastern Niger and Nigeria.

¹⁰ The definitive border between French Niger and British Nigeria was finally established in 1898, a little further south than the original demarcation line.

Ideologically, Western colonialism was justified through the discursive separation of the “civilized white man” and the “uncivilized black man” (Ziai 2006:33ff.). In this discourse, the “uncivilized” were unable to appreciate their abundance of natural resources, and as such, the “white man” was allowed or even obliged to directly exploit and use the “educational instruments” of coercion and force to accomplish their important “civilizing mission” (Ziai 2006). Access to natural resources in the colonies was therefore completely managed and controlled by the colonial power.

1.1 The Military Conquest of Niger

In the colonial scramble for Africa, military conquest was driven by an inner logic of expansion. Due to the *terra nullius* principle in international public law, sovereignty over territory that has never been subject to any state may be acquired through occupation. Of course, against the background of the colonial civilizing discourse, African spaces of dominion were seen as ungoverned areas or blank spots on the map, thereby neglecting the different logics of domination at play. The precolonial Sahel-Sahara was not characterized by a territorial domination of states, but by empires that exercised a logic of domination over trade networks (Walther and Retaillé 2021). Once under way, colonial conquest became self-perpetuating, with powers seeking to ensure that no blank spots or regions should remain outside their control, as that may allow opponents or rebels to set up bases against their dominion (Fuglestad 1983:51).

At the end of the 19th century, the French conquest reached Niger, and it was quite brutal, as the infamous massacres of the Voulet-Chanoine mission in Say in 1899, which are still remembered in contemporary narratives and constitute an element of anti-French sentiments today, only serve to illustrate. However, the perspectives and relationships within and between the French and Nigeriens were much more complex than the narratives of French “civilization” and Nigerien “resistance” suggest (Lefebvre 2022). The military conquest had been motivated by two political and strategic considerations: First, France’s ambition to craft an empire which would expand from North Africa to the Red Sea; and second, its determination to counter expanding British power (Charlick 1991:33). On 5 May 1898, French captain Marius Gabriel Cazemajou and his interpreter passed Zinder, which had been the capital of the powerful Damagaram sultanate since the 18th century. Damagaram’s wealth was based on the reinvestment of taxation revenue from agricultural production into military conquest and slave labor, while its military strength was built on a Trans-Saharan trading economy and close ties with Tuareg nobles (Baier 1980). The organizational structure and wealth of Damagaram sultanate spurred a process of “Hausaization” involving the assimilation of non-Hausa groups through the adoption of the Hausa language, Islam and the exertion of urban influence over surrounding regions (Haour and Rossi 2010).

On the day of their arrival, however, the Sultan of Zinder Amadou dan Ténimoune, commonly known as *Kouran Daga* (the fighting hyena), had Cazemajou and his interpreter murdered, as he feared an anti-Zinder alliance between France

and Sultan Rabeh of Bornu in the Lake Chad region (Decalo 1989:161). The French immediately retaliated, and after facing resistance from Hausa and Tuareg warriors, ultimately defeated the Sultanate Damagaram and established the Third Military Territory of Niger in 1911, of which Zinder became the capital. However, in 1926, the colonial power moved the capital to Niamey, a move which represented a major historical shift in the center of power, from the east to the west. The French had concluded that “the Zarma” were best suited to their “civilizing project” (K. Idrissa 2001), but also formed alliances with Fulani and Soudié¹¹, granting members of these ethnic groups positions of authority without regards to traditional norms of political legitimacy (Charlick 1991:34). The so-installed chiefs gained political leverage as long as they remained loyal to the French (ibid.). As such, from the outset, the French opportunistically shaped internal administration and politics of Niger to suit their own interests. Moreover, while a close look at the early days of colonialism shows that there were indeed multi-vocal and ambivalent perspectives on French colonialism among Africans and soldiers alike, French rule ultimately maintained and reinforced hierarchies, but at the same time conveyed a sense that the existing order was being upended (Lefebvre 2022).

The French colonizer’s economic policy in Niger was purely exploitative and took a heavy toll in terms of material (taxes, grain, livestock) and human resources (construction, labor, troops), often leaving the population impoverished, hungry, and exhausted (Charlick 1991:37). To keep both colonial administration costs to a minimum and to consolidate their control, the French introduced a series of monetary and taxation policies. The most notable was perhaps the replacement of existing currencies like the cowry shell with the franc, the currency the administration demanded their taxes be paid in (ibid.). To acquire the new currency and to be able to pay taxes, farmers across the country switched to cash crop farming, leading to a drop in subsistence farming and leaving the population vulnerable to famine (ibid.:37/38). The platform to achieve its primary goals was groundnut, which quickly became the primary cash crop, as it enabled the administration to generate tax revenue, and to supply the French vegetable oil industry (ibid.:39). In Niger, the groundnut trade greatly increased the inequality between the producing village communities and the urban merchants who appropriated almost all of the surplus (Raynaut 1976).

1.2 After WWI: Niger During the Classic Period of Colonial Rule

Whereas the period of military conquest and consolidation in Niger from the early 1890s until 1922 had been characterized first by the rush to claim territorial sovereignty and then to bring these regions under control and install patterns of rule (Fuglestad

¹¹ Of Hausa ancestry but adopting Zarma customs and language, the Soudié were considered to be Zarma (Decalo 1989:208).

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

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

1.3 After WWII: Towards a New Order in Niger

After WWII, in which oil had played a vital role in the Allied victory, the official political strategy of the successive governments under Charles de Gaulle was to develop all crude deposits within the French colonial empire that were discovered (Yates 2000:73). In this context, the Sahara became strategically important. In 1956 French oil companies discovered Hassi Messaoud, the largest Algerian oil field, and the largest field that any French company had ever discovered. The discovery triggered a Saharan oil boom that would soon reach Niger. In 1958, through its intermediary Mobil West Africa, the Cipao¹² started the first geological and geophysical field detection in the Illumined Basin in western Niger. The region was, however, classified as unfavorable for oil production.

With the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, WWII also illustrated the military supremacy of a nuclear strike force. As such, the end of

¹² The Cipao was bought by Mobil Oil in 1970 and merged with Exxon in 1999 to become ExxonMobil.

WWII also marked a decisive change in the colonial empires' energy policies, not only towards fossil fuels but also toward nuclear energy. In 1945, de Gaulle founded the Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique (CEA) to pursue scientific and technological research on the use of nuclear energy and the development of nuclear weapons for national defense. In 1954, the CEA began prospecting at Tamanrasset in Algeria, and in 1956 they expanded their explorations to include the Agadez region in northern Niger, where the existence of uranium deposits was confirmed later that year.

The end of WWII also marked a decisive change in French political administration of its colonies. This transformation was related to a number of factors, including ethical reasons after the Holocaust that made it politically more difficult to continue the direct exploitation of colonies. Moreover, growing political claims to equality and participation emerged in Niger (as in other colonies) from urban workers, the *évolués*, religious movements, and commercial farmers. Finally, the reordering of world affairs around the Cold War¹³ block formation, as well as the economic demands of an expanding industrial capitalism made it necessary to slowly include the colonies globally into political institutions and economic networks.

In this context, the ideological justification changed as well from “civilization” to “development”, separating the world into “developed” and “underdeveloped” countries and promising those “underdeveloped” countries development in line with the industrialized nations, thereby emphasizing “development assistance” (Escobar 1995; Ziai 2006). While France publicly endorsed the development discourse, the ultimate aim was to uphold their influence, domination and control of the colonies in a changing world order. Responding to these competing demands, the French adopted “developmental colonialism”, an ideological concept that would ultimately bring forth rising demands from the colonies, first on the issue of governmental spending and later on gaining control over the state (F. Cooper 2010:37).

This policy shift triggered a “new order” in the colonies – the era of nationalist politics (1945–1960) (Fuglestad 1983:145/146). According to Charlick (1991:40/41), three forces shaped post-WWII politics in Niger: first, Niger's tiny educated elite, the *évolués*, started to formulate political and economic claims; second, the creation of the Fourth French Republic allowed Africans to participate in the political process; and third, political competition in France opened the door to involving Africans in the political process. Approved in October 1946, the new French constitution integrated the colonies – renamed Overseas Territories (*Territoires d'Outre-Mer*) – inside the structure of the Fourth Republic. The colonized finally became, at least legally, citizens with almost the same rights and duties as the people of metropolitan France. For Fuglestad (1983:148), this “generous” concession was an elegant solution to the ethical problem posed by the Holocaust and WWII, and one that managed to maintain the French empire after colonial rule had become distasteful to many French people.

¹³ The Cold War resulted in a number of “hot wars” in Africa. These proxy wars were in Algeria, Angola, Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and so on (Gleijeses 2002; Greiner 2011). The very notion of the Cold War is thus Euro- and US-centric.

At the same time, it also fulfilled the *évolués*' aspirations for upward mobility, as they would become the major beneficiaries of the new constitution.

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

With the beginning of the Cold War in 1947, the importance of the African parties grew even more, with them becoming proxies in great-power international politics, rather than being merely tied to group interests in Niger and France (Charlick 1991:41). When the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) was forced from the ruling coalition into the political opposition, French colonial officials in Niger used the "spectre of communism" to harass and suppress the PPN that had aligned with the PCF (*ibid.*). When it appeared in 1948 that the PPN was gaining strength, the French colonial Governor of Niger created a rival political movement. The Union Nigérienne des Indépendants et Sympathisants (UNIS) pragmatically bound French and Nigerien traditionalists and modernizers together in their distaste for the "communist" PPN (*ibid.*:44). Although UNIS was formed only three weeks before the election and had no mass base, it won nearly all the rural constituencies, thus making it clear that "the most important factor for electoral success was French support" (*ibid.*). In this sense, the French colonial administration "could still deliver the vote", especially outside the urban centers of Niamey, Zinder, and Maradi (*ibid.*).

Nigerien politicians quickly understood that strategic alliances with the French government were essential for political success. In 1951, the PPN broke with the French Communist Party and joined the Union Démocratique et Sociale de la Résistance (UDSR), a center-right group in the French parliament headed by French Minister of Overseas Affairs François Mitterrand. As a result, the PPN expelled left-wing and anti-traditional party member Djibo Bakary, who had agitated against such a political U-turn (Charlick 1991:45). After the U-turn, the PPN under Diori increasingly turned toward traditionalist politics, thereby becoming once again an appealing

partner for the French Governor's colonial administration. Bakary in turn founded a new political party, the Union Démocratique Nigérienne (UDN), in 1954. Due to political competition with the PPN, Bakary's radical nationalist UDN turned to oppressed groups such as former slaves, low-level civil servants, urban workers, domestic servants, and petty traders who had been largely neglected by the PPN. In doing so, the UDN grew into a highly successful party with a substantial cross-ethnic base in all the major towns (ibid.). When in 1956, the *Loi-Cadre* allowed for the first municipal and territorial elections for a Nigerien government, the former French Governor from the center-right was replaced by a French socialist party governor. He chose to support Bakary's UDN who then became mayor of the capital, Niamey (ibid.:49).

In short, from its outset, electoral politics in Niger has been built on pragmatic or opportunistic alliances, vote buying, the bribery of administrative chiefs, cooptation, and the politics of agitation. Due to the particular historical constellation of colonialism and "underdevelopment", "African nationalism generally involved the rejection of colonial control and the promotion of economic and social modernization, implying the end of 'traditional' control over the population" (Charlick 1991:41). Until today, Nigerien political parties' ideology has predominantly been based on the discourse of "development" in which "the West" has become the appropriate model. Here, it is also important to note that party cleavages in Africa are often ethno-linguistic rather than ideological or programmatic in nature (van de Walle 2003). These are patterns of *longue durée* which continue to dominate politics in Niger and beyond.

1.4 The Creation of the Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes (OCRS)

On 10 January 1957, the French formed the Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes (OCRS) assembling the Saharan zones of Algeria, Mauritania, Sudan, Niger and Chad under joint patronage. This political and territorial reorganization reflected the growing geostrategic significance of the Sahara for France. Firstly, the Sahara's significance had grown on the back of major natural resource discoveries: coal in Algeria in 1917, copper in Mauritania and Niger in 1942 and 1943, tin in Niger in 1945, uranium prospects in Algeria in 1954, and finally major oil discoveries in Algeria in 1956 (Bourgeot 2000:37). Secondly, the Saharan's military significance grew during the world wars, and especially with the so-called North African Campaign (1940–1943), in which wars were fought between the Allied and Axis forces in the Sahara in Libya, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Thirdly, although OCRS was primarily created to focus on the Saharan sub-soil resources, especially oil, it also reinforced an earlier plan to reorganize the Sahara based on racial fantasies of a "white Tuareg nation".

By proclaiming an independent Sahara detached from the different nation states and assigned to the French metropolis, France aimed to maintain their sovereignty over the Saharan sub-soil, and to thereby control resource exploitation (Boilley

1993:220/221). However, with the introduction of the French *Loi-Cadre*, the political project to adopt the OCRS needed elected representatives within the Assembly of the French Union who were in favor of the territorial reorganization. Opposed to the principle of OCRS, Djibo Bakary became a major obstacle for French nationalization of the Sahara. The OCRS was however supported by Bakary's main rival Diori Hamani, and by Tuareg leader Mouddour Zakara, *chef de canton* of Imanan, on the basis of the OCRS' Pan-Tuareg project (Bourgeot 2000:39).

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

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

Nevertheless, the French colonial administrations demarcation of OCRS had once again changed the political landscape in Niger. Not only shifted the French support from Bakary back to Diori, the OCRS also gave rise to Pan-Tuareg politics, and the vision of a Tuareg nation (Bourgeot 2000:27–41). The ethnic conception of a Tuareg nation state in the Sahara later inspired their projects of rebellion (ibid.:43). It is thus no surprise that shortly after the independence of the Nigerien nation state, the First Tuareg Rebellion took place. With its three pillars (identity, territory, and rule), the nation state is a highly ethnic construction in which "a people" has to be defined as the legitimate rulers over a given territory that fuels identitarian (often ethnic or religious) boundary making (Wimmer 2013). This is typically so in the early years of state formation (ibid.). Thus, whereas the First and Second Tuareg Rebellions (1962–1964 and 1990–1995) strove for independence and autonomy respectively, the Third Tuareg Rebellion (2007–2009) focused rather on the equitable economic and the political treatment of northern Niger (Lecocq 2010).

1.5 Niger's Independence Process and the Emergence of the Authoritarian Period

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

France considered Niger's uranium reserves of geostrategic importance for their energy supply and in becoming a nuclear strike force (van Walraven 2009). Thus, to achieve a "yes" vote for Niger to remain within the French dominated *Communauté*, instead of a "no" vote for immediate independence, the French forcefully intervened through harassment, intimidation, repression, military deployment, propaganda and financial support. These interventions on behalf of Diouri who supported a "yes" vote, and against Bakary who supported a "no" vote, proved crucial in securing Niger's electoral decision to remain in the *Communauté*, where it remained until 1960 when it finally became independent (ibid.). Backed by France, Diouri then became the first President of Niger.

The post-colonial constitution of 1960 first provided for a multiparty system, with two large unions emerging: the student union Union des Scolaires Nigériens (USN), and the workers union Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Niger (UNTN) (in 1978, it was renamed Union des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Niger (USTN)). However, although the constitution provided for a multiparty system, already by 1963 Niger became a one-party state. With continued French support, Diouri suppressed political opponents, finally forcing Bakary into exile. Through their intervention, France had thus laid the foundation for the autocratic regimes to follow independence, profoundly shaping the Nigerien political landscape for years to come (van Walraven 2009). Without political opposition parties, the unions, and the USN in particular, formed the nation's de facto political opposition, at least until 1983, when violent clashes left the movement paralyzed for several years (Smirnova 2019). Paradoxically, around the time of the creation of the one-party state, international NGOs began to intervene in the Sahel, taking over state responsibilities from a ruling elite that pursued policies to protect the sovereignty of their states against neocolonialism (Mann 2015).

France's agreement to decolonize Niger had only been achieved through the establishment of secret military arrangements, resource agreements, and special monetary zones which all served to secure France's energy security (Sharife 2010; Hecht 2010b:chapter4&7). First, concerning the special monetary zones, France upheld its influence after formal independence through its two colonial monetary zones, the Colonies Françaises d'Afrique (CFA) franc zones for West and for Central Africa that

were created in 1945. Renamed the franc of the *Communauté Française d'Afrique* (CFA) in 1958, the special monetary zones remain in force today, with the CFA franc (XOF) tied to the euro at a fixed rate of 655.957 XOF to the Euro. Second, concerning the secret military arrangements and resource agreements, Niger signed a defense treaty in 1961, one year after independence, which granted the former colonizing power priority access to uranium and other strategic materials. Founded in 1968, the *Société des Mines de l'Air* (SOMAIR) finally began mining near Arlit in 1970–71, while the *Compagnie Minière d'Akouta* (COMINAK) (founded in 1974) started uranium production from the Akouta deposit in 1978. These two companies were subsidiaries of French-based company COGEMA and its successors Areva (2001–2018) and Orano (since 2018), which retains control over the two mines.¹⁴ Until today, the French retain a profound influence over Niger's military (Mahamane 2004) which continues to shape the contemporary political landscape (K. Idrissa 2004). One can therefore argue that the history of postcolonial Niger is deeply entrenched with its history of uranium exploration and production, and that a nation state emerged which has a strong content of uranium (Grégoire 2011).

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

From 1968 onwards, shrinking revenues from groundnut production led to the disintegration of Diori's clientelist base and internal conflicts within the PPN began to emerge (Robinson 1991:8). Also in 1968, US broker Nuexco began publishing a spot-price for uranium. Although most international transactions fell under long-term contracts in which fixed prices remained secret, as specified in the French-Nigerien defense treaty signed in 1961, the (imagined) spot-price fluctuations constantly gave rise to questions about the distribution of profits between Niger and COGEMA (Hecht 2010b:14). When the spot price for uranium increased in early 1974¹⁵, the impossibility of adhering to the high costs of clientelism, exacerbated by the drought of 1973,

¹⁴ Orano holds a 63.4 percent share in SOMAIR, whereas the Nigerien state has a 36.6 percent share. In COMINAK, Orano has a 34 percent share, the Nigerien state has 31 percent, Overseas Uranium Resources Development (OURD) from Japan has 25 percent, and Enusa Industrias Avanzadas SA from Spain has 10 percent.

¹⁵ The Nuexco spot price for uranium increased from 7 USD/pound in 1974 to over 40 USD/pound in 1976.

forced President Diori to start negotiations with France over the uranium price.¹⁶ Before the negotiations had been concluded, Diori was overthrown in a military coup by Lieutenant-Colonel Seyni Kountché. Although new access to archival material shows that France was not involved in the coup, the dominant narrative among Nigeriens today, amid anti-French sentiment, is that the coup was planned and executed with French military support because Diori wanted to renegotiate Niger's share of uranium profits (van Walraven 2014).

The beginning of uranium mining in Niger in 1971 brought a radical change in the country's political economy. By 1975 groundnut production had come to a standstill after years of drought, with uranium revenues more than double the former peaks in groundnut revenue. In the following years, uranium mining generated previously unexpected financial resources for the Nigerien government. Having installed a military regime after coming to power, President Kountché used an unexpected increase in the uranium revenues to establish a *société de développement* and announced a series of ambitious development goals (Robinson 1991:7–10). The beneficiaries of Kountché's development programs were primarily civil servants, administrative chiefs, wage earners and traders – groups which would have to be appeased when the revenue from uranium exports suddenly collapsed in the 1980s.

By the beginning of 1980, the first signs of recession were being felt in Niger. Economic growth had fallen from 13 percent in 1979 to 1.1 percent in 1981 and continued to decline by an average of two percent per annum over subsequent years (Robinson 1991:11). At the same time, Kountché's ambitious *société de développement* locked the government into large spending and led to a growing budget deficit. In 1983, Niger was forced to apply for its first loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The loan was made conditional on the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), which was to begin in 1986. Under the SAP, the government was forced to make major cuts in state sector employment. The austerity measures hit the beneficiaries of the *société de développement* hardest, leading to societal tensions which threatened the stability of the regime and reinforced a feeling of bitterness toward the West that lasts until today. With the mass dismissal of state officials, youth in particular began to feel a kind of hopelessness and started to organize in conversation groups or tea circles called *fada* (Masquelier 2013, 2019).

This brief history of the political economy and the origins of political conflicts in Niger illustrate that these conflicts are not simply a result of fighting for the biggest piece of the resource pie (uranium), as the resource curse thesis suggests, but rather that their origins date back to the colonial era and are inherently intertwined with French (post)colonial policy. It furthermore becomes clear how revenues from primary commodity exports (groundnut, uranium) were used as material resources in political power struggles. Both revenues from groundnut and uranium production were used to build clientelist networks whose base threatened to collapse each time the financial

¹⁶ In accordance with the defense treaty signed in 1961, uranium negotiations were on the state-to-state level.

leverage of the government shrank. The following history on the introduction of a multiparty system in Niger will show effects of a change in the “rules of the game”.

1.6 The Democratic Transition: Changing the Rules of the Game in Niger

After Kountché’s death in 1987, the Supreme Military Council elected General Ali Saibou to succeed him. His term in office was marked by measures to mediate critics and rivals to consolidate power. Saibou introduced political liberalization measures allowing for the foundation of political organizations and the establishment of state political party, the Mouvement National pour une Société de Développement (MNSD-Nassara). Initially, however, no opposition parties were allowed. With this new commitment to political openness, Saibou sought to win the sympathies of international donors and to thereby compensate for the falling uranium export revenues. The structural adjustment measures, however, met resistance within Niger, especially from trade and student unions, which refused to pay the costs of austerity. The students USN and the workers USTN organized mass joint strikes and demonstrations on 9 February 1990, in which three protestors were killed and dozens were injured. These protests proved a turning point, and by the end of the year, Saibou finally agreed to the transition to a multiparty system and, following the example of other West African countries, the holding of a National Conference to determine the future of the country.

The economic crisis and the subsequent National Conference would fundamentally change power configurations in Niger (Gervais 1997). With their participation in the National Conference, the USN and USTN gained official recognition as legitimate countervailing powers to the state, as did political parties and civil society structures, which were allowed to form after changes to regulations in May 1991.¹⁷ With this law, civil society associations proliferated, with more than one thousand having formed in Niger between 1991 and 2015, most of which have been relatively short-lived (Tidjani Alou 2015a:138). While the intellectual Western-educated elite of the country (civil servants, teachers and university lecturers, trade unions and students) profited most in the wake of the conference, the rural population and the informal sector remained underrepresented, and the army was ousted from its dominant role on the political scene.

With the reintroduction of the multiparty system, a number of new parties emerged, but all faced the same fundamental problem, that they had little reach or popularity outside of the electoral base around the region of origin of the party president. As a response to western-Zarma hegemony, a regionalist-cultural association with the innocent name Association Mutuelle pour la Culture et les Arts (AMACA)

¹⁷ Non-governmental and human rights associations were formally introduced by law in May 1991 (Loi n° 91-06 du 20 mai 1991, p. 433; http://www.justice.gouv.ne/images/lois/pdfs/recueil_thematique_de_textes_legislatifs_et_reglementaires.pdf).

had already been formed in 1989 in Zinder, the center of Hausa resistance (Lund 1998:94).¹⁸ AMACA's objectives were to protect Zinder-Hausa civil servants against Zarma favoritism in the state apparatus, and to favor the region in terms of national development. Composed of intellectuals and financed by wealthy businessmen, AMACA soon recruited large numbers of non-intellectuals, morphing into the political party Convention Démocratique et Sociale (CDS-Rahama) in early 1990s. The CDS' strategy was to win the support of the Hausa majority by underlining the injustice which Damagaram had suffered since the colonial period, especially persistent water shortage. This shortage was blamed on insufficient infrastructure due to a lack political will on the national level in Niamey, as well as government officials abusing power. To solve this problem, the people needed justice, and for that to happen, power needed to shift from the west back to the east (Lund 1998:94; Danda 2004:323).

However, the ruling MNSD had a great advantage because, after 30 years in power, they could build on large networks across the country. In particular, they could rely on the support of the administrative chiefs that were created under colonialism and had played an important role in the *société de développement*. Held in February 1993, the first free elections saw the majority of the vote divided between four parties: the Convention Démocratique et Sociale (CDS-Rahama) led by Mahamane Ousmane, the Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme (PNDS-Tarayya) led by Mahamadou Issoufou, the Alliance Nigérienne pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (ANDP-Zaman Lahiya) led by Moumouni Adamou Djermakoye, and the MNSD led by Mahamadou Tandja. Tandja had become leader of the MNSD after Ali Saibou and other key actors in his government were banned from competing in the first free elections.¹⁹ Tandja won the first-round vote, making the MNSD the strongest party. However, in an effort to prevent the former ruling party from once again seizing power, nine of the 12 approved parties united behind Ousmane as their presidential candidate in the second head-to-head round of the election. With this support, Ousmane became President of Niger's Third Republic.

The reintroduction of a multiparty system in Niger also gave rise to a decade of experimentation and repeated breakdowns of the institutional order (Villalón and Idrissa 2005). Based on the constitution of the French Fifth Republic of 1958, the semi-presidential third constitution was passed in December 1992 and enacted in January 1993. Taking office on 16 April 1993, Ousmane's term as president was characterized by the burden of the SAP and "cohabitation" between a majority opposition and a minority government, resulting in institutional paralysis. Ousmane had been in power for less than three years when, in January 1996, Colonel Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara led a military coup that toppled the government. Baré introduced the constitution of the Nigerien Fourth Republic which granted greater powers to the president, legitimizing this step

¹⁸ However, Ibrahim and Niandou-Souley (1998:152) write that AMACA was formed in 1982.

¹⁹ The Parti Progressiste Nigerien (PPN) of Diiori Hamani and the Union Démocratique Nigerien (UDN) of Djibo Bakary, which had dominated the struggle for independence, were both founded anew. However, they were able to obtain only two seats each.

as essential to avoid future cohabitation in the parliament. When Baré won the ensuing election (which most national and international observers claimed were fraudulent) in July 1996, the four major parties (MNSD, CDS, PNDS and ANDP) united in a “movement for democracy”, boycotting participation in government. In 1999, Baré was assassinated by members of his own guard, and Major Dadouda Mallam Wanké became head of state. He suspended the constitution of the Fourth Republic, and returned to a semi-presidential system that was virtually identical to that of the Third Republic. The top four presidential candidates from 1993 – Mamadou Tandja (MNSD), Mahamadou Issoufou (PNDS), Mahamane Ousmane (CDS) and Moumouni Adamou Djermakoye (ANDP) – once again competed for presidency, with similar results. This time however, Ousmane allied with Tandja, who thus became President of Niger’s Fifth Republic. Tandja named Hama Amadou his prime minister.

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

1.7 Maintaining the Social Peace

Since their legitimization as a counter power to the state in the National Conference, civil society has had an ambiguous role in regime changes in Niger more generally. Elischer (2019) shows how Niger’s trade unions were largely driven by economic demands, and thus contributed to both autocratic and democratic breakdowns of

power. Under the new democratic constitutions, the state monopoly of radio and television had also been abandoned, guaranteeing the freedom and independence of the media.²⁰ After years of silence under authoritarian rule, an emerging civil society and private media was able to publicly debate politics. They increasingly started to see their role as a counter-power to the state. After the integration of the USTN and USN into the transition to a multiparty system, these organizations agitated against the first democratically elected government of Ousmane, as they did not want to pay the costs of austerity measures enforced under the SAP. In doing so, they ultimately contributed to delegitimizing and paralyzing Niger's Third Republic (Gazibo 1998). Indeed, Nigerien political observer Adji (no date) goes as far as to argue that civil society and private media's active role in building public pressure against the government made them complicit in Ousmane's fall. The fact that civil society opposition to the military government remained subdued after regime change in 1996 supports this argument.

After a long civil society silence, the Coalition Équité, Qualité et Lutte Contre la Vie Chère – publicly known as Coalition Contre la Vie Chère – “reinjected politics into public life” (Tidjani Alou 2007) in 2005 by protesting against an increase in value-added tax (VAT) from 15 to 19 percent. Focusing on rising food prices and the increase in VAT, this civil society coalition organized demonstrations, general strikes and operations called *ville morte* (English: “ghost town”) that became a major success. On 15 March 2005, 100,000 to 150,000 people are said to have participated in a demonstration in Niamey, the movement “against the high cost of living” becoming a genuine threat to the stability to the Tandja government. When the coalition called for further public demonstrations, the government arrested the five leading activists – Marou Amadou, Nouhou Arzika, Kassoum Issa, Moustafa Kadi and Moussa Tchangari – on charges of threatening the security of the state and organizing illegal assemblies.²¹

After the arrests, the government started negotiations with the coalition leaders. With newly gained financial leverage through external funding, especially development aid, Tandja was able to acquiesce to many of the protestors demands and calm

²⁰ Ordonnance n°93–29 du 30 mars 1993 portant régime de la liberté de presse. Journal officiel (12) 4–7.

²¹ Amadou, Arzika, and Tchangari had been active members of the USN during the student protests on 9 February 1990, and had been representatives of the USN at the National Conference. At the time of the coalition, Marou Amadou, a jurist, was a member of several civil society associations, especially in democracy, transparency and human rights movements – the Collectif des Organisations de Défense des Droits de l'Homme et de la Démocratie (CODDHD), the Coalition Démocratique de la Société Civile Nigérienne (CDSCN), and most importantly, he was the founder and president of the Comité de Réflexion et d'Orientation Indépendant pour la Sauvegarde des Acquis Démocratiques (CROISADE). Nouhou Arzika, a manager, was the founder of consumer association OCRONI and president of the Mouvement Patriotique pour la Défense de la Nation et du Peuple (MPDNP). Kassoum Issa, a teacher, was general secretary of the teachers' union Syndicat National des Enseignants du Niger (SNEN). Moustafa Kadi was member of Timidria, an organization to fight slavery in Niger and most importantly the coordinator of the Collectif pour la Défense du Droit à l'Énergie (CODDAE). Moussa Tchangari was a journalist, founder and secretary general of the civil society association and radio station Alternative Espaces Citoyens (AEC).

the situation.²² The government and the coalition reached a ten-point agreement, including the withdrawal of the increase of VAT (except for sugar), with the loss of government revenue to be made up through increases in business and the property taxes. To collect these taxes, the Tandja government – on the initiative of the Coalition Contre la Vie Chère – founded a Comité d'Appui aux Services d'Assiette et de Recouvrement des taxes et Impôts Fonciers (CASARIF), to which the coalition was allowed to propose six members, creating division among the leaders. Marou Amadou became the committee's vice-coordinator, while Moussa Tchangari publicly remained opposed to the idea of civil society entering governmental committees. Similarly, the Syndicat National des Enseignants du Niger (SNEN), Kassoum Issa's teachers' union, had been demanding payment of salary arrears amongst other things since 2004, the Tandja government invited the union leaders into governmental decision-making processes to jointly solve these issues. In late 2005, Tandja finally started to acquiesce to SNEN demands, but did not fulfil the conditions when the union's position weakened over time (Charlick 2007a:75/76). This is a typical example of how cooptation works in a Nigerien context, with governmental committees being created to include civil society members that are then offered certain privileges and financial benefits in these committees such as daily and travel allowances. In coopting civil society activists into governmental decision-making and by using public funds or intimidation to quell political opposition, Tandja was able to not only maintain social peace, but also to pursue his political projects for the years to come.

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

It was in this context that the Tuareg rebel group Mouvement des Nigérien pour la Justice (MNJ) launched attacks on the Nigerien military and Areva in February 2007, justifying them as protest against foreign exploitation of uranium. While the reasons

²² Tandja's reign (1999–2010) was characterized by debt relief and new economic stability (Dorlöchter-Sulser 2014:137–49).

for the Third Tuareg Rebellion (2007–2009) are more complex (Keenan 2008), and as I have illustrated above, have historical roots in colonialism, the rebellion leaders' discourse focused on uranium. They argued that the Tuareg population had been forced to bear the brunt of uranium pollution of the water, air and soil, blamed the national government and Areva for regional marginalization, and claimed a larger share of the uranium profits.²³ Against the background of the US War on Terror, Tandja's government classified the MNJ as a terrorist group. This move received support from some civil society activists, especially Nouhou Arzika's *Mouvement Patriotique pour la Défense de la Nation et du Peuple* (MPDNP), which argued against diplomatic efforts, and for a military solution to put down the rebels. Again, these groups' pro-government stance illustrates part of the political game in Niger, in that Tandja had successfully divided and weakened civil society by coopting some leaders into governmental positions.

At the same time, Tandja's government also accused France and Areva of instigating and financing the rebellion, and expelled Areva's head of operations in July 2007. This provoked the direct intervention of French president Nicolas Sarkozy. High level Franco-Nigerien talks calmed the situation and led to an agreement between Areva and Niger on 1 August 2007. In order not to lose its largest uranium supplier, Areva agreed to both demands: to increase the price for yellowcake laid down in the secret contracts, and to make some available for Niger to sell on its own (Hecht 2010a:18).²⁴ Some months later, Areva also agreed to develop the Imouraren deposit.²⁵ At the time of the agreement, production was scheduled to start in 2012, but the project soon ran into delays, making it even unlikely to start at all. It was in this context that the Tandja government signed an oil production sharing agreement with China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) in 2008.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at the political history of Niger together with its political economy to create a holistic picture of the country's economic and socio-political con-

²³ This form of discourse was relatively new, for it was only with political liberalization in the early 1990s that the topic of uranium exploitation could be publicly taken up and debated (Topçu 2013: 293). Established in 2000, the environmental organization Agir in Man (Tamasheq for "the protection of the soul") lists and records the effects of uranium extraction in northern Niger on the environment, health and poverty. Agir in Man primarily blames Areva (Orano) for radioactive pollution in the area and calls for an independent investigation into the pollution and its social and ecological effects, as well as demanding financial compensation for the rehabilitation of the uranium mines.

²⁴ Areva increased royalty payments from 27,300 XOF/kgU (42 Euro/kgU) to 40,000 XOF/kgU (61 Euro/kgU) and provided 300 tons of uranium for Niger to sell on the open market, which Niger sold to Exelon in the US for 42 million USD (World Nuclear Association 2013).

²⁵ An overall investment of 1.6 billion USD was planned for the project, as well as Areva supplying 7.8 million USD per year provided for social services – health, education, training and transport, as well as access to water and energy for local development in northern Niger (World Nuclear Association 2013).

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

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

To understand the socio-cultural and political transformations triggered by oil, we have to keep uranium-age Niger as a point of comparison, as it was in this social and political constellation that the oil project finally started in 2008. Indeed, even before the first barrel had been produced, oil was being put to use in political disputes which followed the logic of the Nigerien political game. I turn to that now.

2 Narrating Oil

Before Niger finally entered the oil-age, the country already had a 50-year history of exploration. Conducted mainly by French and American based companies, this exploration started in 1958, two years after the first major oil discoveries had been made in neighboring Algeria. But while uranium exploitation began in the 1970s, commercial oil production would ultimately remain a long way off. Foreign interest in Nigerien oil increased as the international price skyrocketed with the 1973 oil crisis. Companies such as Conoco, Shell, Global Energy, Sun Oil, Texaco, Esso and Elf then acquired permits for various oil blocks, with the Agadem block in the country's far east proving especially promising. First positive results became known to political circles and at least parts of the Nigerien public in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but the oil remained in a "state of not-yet-ness" (Witte 2017): the discursive presence of oil's absence materialized in political circles and the public, and the expectation was that oil production would soon commence. This expectation is not fulfilled in Niger for another three decades. However, as I will show in the following, imaginary, anticipatory and narrative practices around oil generate new uncertainties and aspirations and ultimately translate into political power (Witte 2018).

2.1 The Rule of Mamadou Tandja (1999–2010)

Still in 2006, Esso and Petronas had abandoned the Agadem oil block, judging that it would not be profitable in the context of low world oil prices and with reserves of only about 350 million barrels, according to their estimation. The 2007 US subprime crisis and the 2008 financial world crisis suddenly increased the value of one barrel of oil from around 30 USD in 2006 to 147 USD in July 2008 (O. Moussa 2012). Eager to finally kickstart extraction in Niger, in 2007 the Tandja government adopted a new Petroleum Code and launched an international call for tenders for the Agadem block. In June 2008, Niger finally signed a production sharing contract with the CNPC to produce oil in the Agadem block and to build a joint-venture refinery (for a detailed list of all oil companies and their activities in Niger see the table on the history of oil in the appendix).²⁶ The CNPC planned to export the crude through a connecting pipeline to the existing Chad-Cameroon pipeline. For concluding the contract, the CNPC paid the Nigerien government a 300 million USD bonus. Moreover, they agreed on a division of oil profit by 40 percent for Niger and 60 percent for CNPC. The profits of CNPC are taxed by a 12.5 percent ad valorem royalty.

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

In making use of the resource curse scenario, long-time academic and political observers of Niger have come to the conclusion that the *Tazartché* campaign was triggered by oil and uranium (the resource curse). After all, *Tazartché* was designed to alter the constitution and re-elect Tandja as president, thereby placing him in the best position to capture future oil and uranium rents (Grégoire 2010, 2011; Gazibo 2011:222–223). While this hypothesis may initially seem appealing, it does not withstand empirical scrutiny. In other words, a closer look at the emergence of oil, and its

²⁶ The CNPC initially estimated reserves of about 744 million barrels of oil and 16 billion m³ of gas (O. Moussa 2012).

²⁷ Tandja's presidency officially ended in 2009 after two mandates, as specified in the Nigerien Constitution of the Fifth Republic.

relationship to political conflict in Niger, undermines the clear-cut causal links predicted by the resource curse thesis.

2.1.1 The Origins of *Tazartché*

On 7 July 2005, when the oil price was around 30 USD/barrel and extraction of Niger's reserves was still considered economically unviable, and one year before Esso and Petronas had abandoned the Agadem block, and two years before the Nigerien government decided to diversify its resource sector, and three years before the oil contract was signed with CNPC, the private Nigerien newspaper *Le Témoin* published an article about an "underground war" between Prime Minister Hama Amadou and President Mamadou Tandja due to rumors that Tandja would opt for a third mandate (Gaoh 2005).²⁸ Conflicts between Tandja and Hama²⁹ had arisen the previous year, when Tandja announced his candidacy for a second term. At that time, Hama had the image of Niger's strong man pulling the strings, while Tandja was seen as an old man only executing the office of the presidency symbolically. However, Tandja's announcement showed his willingness to continue in office, and he defeated Hama in the power struggle inside the party, the MNSD-Nassara.

While Tandja had won the internal conflict and would stand for a second mandate in 2005, Hama remained the prime minister, and had clear intentions of standing for the presidency in the 2009 election, when Tandja would no longer be able to stand. However, rumors that Tandja would attempt to change the constitution so that he could stand for a third mandate fueled a conflict between Tandja and Hama's respective political camps. In December 2005, shortly after the first rumors of *Tazartché* had spread, Hama announced his candidacy for the 2009 presidential elections. In doing so, he made public his determination to fight any possible attempt by Tandja to instigate constitutional change and prolong his presidency. When embezzlement of international donor funds in the education and alphabetization ministry (Ministère de l'Éducation de Base et de l'Alphabétisation, or MEBA) became public in 2006, and the international donor community demanded answers, Tandja used the so-called *affaire MEBA* to target members of Hama's political camp. With the anti-corruption campaign *opération mains propres* (operation clean hands), Tandja finally removed Hama from office with a vote of no-confidence in 2007, imprisoning him along with some of his inner circle the following year.³⁰ Having eliminated his strongest political opponent inside the party, Tandja gained a wide range of powers, and was left virtually unopposed.

²⁸ In a 2005 publication, (Keenan 2005:406) also already mentioned Tandja's attempt at constitutional change to prolong his presidency.

²⁹ In Niger, Hama Amadou is referred to as Hama and not Amadou. I therefore use Hama.

³⁰ I do not claim that Hama was innocent, but rather that corruption and embezzlement of public funds are part of the political game (Olivier de Sardan 1999a). In this sense, Hama could be understood as a political prisoner.

The Tandja government officially portrayed the *Tazartché* movement at the oil refinery's inauguration in Zinder as a spontaneous social movement initiated by the youth of Zinder because Tandja had chosen this historically marginalized region as the site of the refinery. However, I argue that *Tazartché* was a carefully organized and staged event. To make the strategically fabricated "will of the population" for him to remain in office a public fact, Tandja coopted popular civil society associations and labor unions to support *Tazartché* (Abdoul Azizou 2010). By its very proclamation, the Nigerien people's will would be made a political reality. Nouhou Arzika's Mouvement Patriotique pour la Défense de la Nation et du Peuple (MPDNP) and Dan Dubaï's Mouvement Populaire pour la Pérennisation des Actions du Développement (MPPAD) became the leading lobbyists for *Tazartché*, who together with other actors from politics and civil society formed a national "*Tazartché* committee".³¹ Throughout the country, Dan Dubaï became widely regarded as the founding father of *Tazartché*, having founded the MPPAD in Zinder to speak on behalf of the *Zindérois*. He also became affiliated with Tandja's party, the MNSD-Nassara. Like the MPDNP and the MPPAD, the USN student union also became a vocal supporter of *Tazartché*. In return for their support, Tandja gave these civil society activists seats on the various governmental bodies which had emerged with political liberalization in the 1990s.

To understand how Tandja was able to co-opt certain civil society organizations, and not others, we must look not only at these groups' political and ideological affiliations, but also at their sources of funding. As Bayart (2000) has argued, African states (and with it also African civil society associations) have, over the *longue durée*, always been outwardly oriented (extroverted rather than introverted) to secure financial flows coming from the outside (mostly Western countries but increasingly today from China, India and Russia). In doing so, these associations make themselves dependent on their donors and must align to their agenda (Hearn 2001). At the time Tandja was seeking supporters for *Tazartché*, Nouhou Arzika's MPDNP was the only one of five major associations that had no significant international donors. As such, it was "free" and willing to join *Tazartché*, especially as the campaign's patriotic and anti-imperial rhetoric matched well with the MPDNP's image. Although Moussa Tchangari's Alternative Espaces Citoyens (AEC), commonly referred to as Alternative, anti-imperialist and nationalist rhetoric was also similar to Tandja's, they were not viable or able to support the campaign due to both their international partnerships, and their close relationship with Nigerien intellectuals who primarily supported the "socialist" PNDS-Tarayya party. As such, the organization refrained from taking a clear position on *Tazartché*. Moustafa Kadi's Collectif pour la Défense du Droit à l'Énergie (COD-DAE) was prevented from active intervention and declared itself neutral, as its main international donors (including the IMF) represented themselves as "apolitical". Kasoum Issa's SNEN teachers' union also declared itself neutral; while Tandja had been able to quell or appease the unions and their members in 2005, the unions retained a

³¹ I name the leaders of these civil society organizations as these organizations, like political parties and large businesses, are highly personalized.

traditional closeness to the PNDS, as the “socialist” party. Finally, Marou Amadou’s Comité de Réflexion et d’Orientation Indépendant pour la Sauvegarde des Acquis Démocratiques (CROISADE) became one of the major voices against *Tazartché*, as the association focused on “the defense of democracy” and may have been pushed (or financially supported) by international donors to side with the political opposition.

After its launch, government supporters led demonstrations, and appeared in shows on state television and radio stations throughout the country to bring Tandja’s message. The *Tazartché* campaign followed a tight script with three key messages: first, that it was the will of the Nigerien people that the constitution be changed so that Tandja could remain in office; second, that the development of Nigerien oil and uranium was intimately connected with the person of Tandja; and third, that a move to a presidential regime was better suited to Nigerien culture (Baudais and Chauzal 2011:298). Tandja was presented as the father of oil production, whose “pragmatism” and “nationalism” had allowed Niger to become an oil producer: the “pragmatic” Tandja “first acts and then talks”, in contrast to the main opposition leader, the “intellectual” Issoufou (and his PNDS party, which generally attracted the support of intellectuals) who “first talks and then (never) acts”. Moreover, Tandja was a “nationalist”, a strong anti-imperial and anti-neocolonial leader willing and able to resist Western interference. The campaigns fundamental message was simple, losing Tandja as president at this decisive moment of history would bring instability to Niger, threaten its oil project, and indeed its entire development.³²

For the Tandja government, the Nigerien oil project was essential to achieve economic growth through industrialization, economic diversification and decentralization. The government claimed that oil production would kick start development in Niger in three ways. Firstly, with the construction of the Kandaji river dam, oil revenues would be used to finance the transition of Niger’s subsistence agriculture to modern irrigated agriculture. Secondly, the construction of an oil refinery was expected to reduce the costs of energy imports (especially of oil products from Venezuela and water energy from Nigeria), secure the national fuel and gas supplies, and promote industrialization. Thirdly, the surplus fuel would be sold to the West African sub-region, where fuel prices were higher than in Niger.³³ Moreover, the idea of their development strategy was to boost Niger’s economy by implementing industrial mega-projects or so-called *pôles de développement* (development poles) in every region of the country: uranium production in the North (Agadez), gold production and a river dam in the West (Tillabéri), oil extraction in the East (Diffa), and a cement plant in the center (Tahoua). Despite extra costs, the Tandja government decided to build the refinery in Zinder and not in Diffa, since the Zinder region had no development pole at the time.

³² “Father of the nation” narratives are not only characteristic of authoritarian regimes (Franke-Schwenk 2014), but also hold true for authoritarian projects in a setting of multiparty politics, as the *Tazartché* campaign illustrates.

³³ Fuel prices in West Africa in September 2012 in XOF: Benin 640, Burkina Faso 727, Côte d’Ivoire 774, Mali 750, Senegal 847, Togo 597, and Niger 579.

Moreover, as the Diffa region borders Chad and Nigeria, which have both seen severe conflict in the past decades, and as a Tubu rebellion in the 1990s took place in the region, the government argued that Zinder was a safer region for development.

However, apart from this official portrayal, it seems that Tandja had chosen Zinder as he wanted to bring Mahamane Ousmane into his project for constitutional change. Originating from Zinder, Ousmane was then president of one of Niger's largest parties, the CDS-Rahama, that was part of Tandja's government at the time. With the transition to a multiparty system, the CDS emerged as an eastern Nigerien and Hausa ethnic response to historical western Nigerien and Zarma ethnic dominance (Lund 2001). With its electoral stronghold in Zinder, Tandja was eager to win CDS support for *Tazartché*, a move that would have severely weakened opposition to his campaign for constitutional change.

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

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

President Tandja is able to fully explain and speak in the clearest possible manner, so that everyone may understand the situation in Niger today. I sincerely respect our constitution. I grew up with military regulations, I came to know the laws and regulations of my country as a soldier. I entered politics and I came to know what the constitution is. I love democracy and I have done a lot of things for it. Today, I am president of the republic, having won two mandates in accordance with the constitution. Here, I end my two mandates. Growing up for me is to leave with your head up. If the table is cleared, you have to leave. It is not about searching for another mandate. I have always been clear on this.

I have never asked any Nigerien at any time if they can do this or that—never! And I will never do it—asking if they could change the Nigerien constitution for me or search for modifications to our constitution: I would keep it as it is, I prefer it like this until the end! Now, for the good of the Nigerien people, the regions raised in order to say: ‘Allow President Tandja three more years to complete the great construction sites that he has started, for reasons of stability and for reasons to complete what is programmed.’ It’s the business of the people and of the assembly and not for Tandja. Tandja would neither talk to the assembly’s president nor to anyone else in order to say to the assembly to take care of the issue. That’s not my business, but it is up to them [the Nigerien people and the assembly] to know what to do. I’m ready to quit tomorrow. The 22nd of December, it’s the end of my mandate. Goodbye, I retire and thank you!³⁴

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

On the one hand, Tandja’s explicit awareness of the democracy discourses (free elections, human rights, freedom of opinion and press etc.) underlying Western political rationalities reminds us that the extroverted speech was clearly aimed at an international audience. Sitting next to Sarkozy, he presented himself as a democratic leader who could not do anything but follow the will of the Nigerien people and the assembly. With the new agreement between Areva and Niger from August 2007 in place, Sarkozy in return assured Tandja that France would continue its neutrality concerning internal Nigerien national politics (Grégoire 2010). Sarkozy’s reassurance had thereby bolstered Tandja’s hand inside Niger. On the other hand, however, Tandja’s understanding of democracy does not appear to revolve around the constitution (and the two-term presidential limit) but rather a desire to follow “the people’s will”. As the speech extract shows, Tandja does not completely deny any constitutional change, but rather highlights that such a change is the responsibility of the Nigerien assembly and the population as a whole. Here, Tandja reiterates the main themes of the campaign that only he and he alone could complete what he had started. Moreover, he reiterates that electoral change would bring instability and threaten the oil and uranium projects. In other words, Tandja was trying to deny any personal involvement in the campaign for constitutional change to prove that *Tazartché* was “the will of the people”, and to maintain social and political order in Niger for as long as possible.

On 4 May 2009, over six months after *Tazartché*’s public launch, and a few weeks after his meeting with Sarkozy, Tandja finally confirmed his intention to change the

³⁴ Video recording by elysee.fr on 27.3.2009: “Conférence de presse conjointe avec M. Mamadou TANDJA” (<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xc7y0r>); own transcription and translation from French.

constitution. To illustrate the importance of *Tazartché* in completing the *grands chantiers*, it was again at a foundation stone ceremony, this time of the Imouraren uranium mine, that Tandja made the second public step toward *Tazartché*. In an interview with *France 24* and *Libération*, he said: “The people demand that I stay. I cannot remain insensitive to their requests” (Hofnung 2009). On May 26, one day after the constitutional court declared *Tazartché*’s proposals unconstitutional, Tandja dissolved parliament. In a speech to the nation three days later, he finally declared a referendum. The referendum was set by decree for August 4, with the campaign to start on July 13. On June 2, a committee composed of Tandja supporters was established to draft a new constitution, which it handed over only one week later.

On June 8, the political opposition went to the constitutional court to block the referendum, and on June 12, it was invalidated. In response, Tandja called on the constitutional court to give him full powers. After the court refused, he first demanded the court withdraw their annulment of the presidential decree and then – after another refusal by the court – declared in a speech to the nation that he had granted himself exceptional powers to govern by decree, although this could have only been done by the parliament which he had dissolved two weeks prior (Gazibo 2011:343). Tandja then sacked the entire court, and appointed new members to it, justifying this as the will of the people. Tandja also used state-sponsored public media to promote the referendum and persecuted journalists who opposed it. With an opposition boycott, *Tazartché* won 92.5 percent of the vote in the August 4 referendum. Given the overwhelming majority, it is not surprising that both the political opposition and the international community claimed election fraud. While the Tandja government claimed that 68.28 percent of eligible voters had taken part, a rate of participation never before achieved in Niger, the political opposition claimed barely five percent participation (Coordination des Forces pour la Démocratie et la République 2009). After the election, “[t]he new ‘constitutional court,’ entirely appointed by Tandja, rubber-stamped the outcome and the new constitution of the Sixth Republic effectively came into force.” (Gazibo 2011:344).

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

2.1.2 Reactions against *Tazartché*

As it had done throughout the previous two decades of institutional breakdowns and regime transitions following the introduction of the multiparty system, the political elite firmly united against Tandja's attempt to centralize power (Villalón and Idrissa 2005). On 16 July 2009, the political opposition joined with several labor unions and civil society associations, to form a "movement for democracy", the Coordination des Forces pour la Démocratie et la République (CFDR). As constitutional change would have allowed Tandja to stand for re-election repeatedly, it posed a threat to the political class, who feared losing their access to the "rent of political liberalization" that had emerged with the multiparty system. That is, multiparty politics have allowed a small civilian political elite to stay in power in ever-changing alliances between different political factions and major merchants (Olivier de Sardan 2016). In doing so, they have taken possession of state resources through political postings, systematic corruption, the embezzlement of funds, tax favors and the distribution of public markets (ibid.).

Rather than questioning Tandja's image of pragmatism and nationalism, the opposition decided to play the extroverted "democracy card" by speaking of a "coup d'état constitutionnel" (Coordination des Forces pour la Démocratie et la République 2009). Addressing the international community, the opposition organized pro-democracy demonstrations and called for sanctions against Niger. Then opposition leader Mahamadou Issoufou even called for military intervention. The strategy worked, with international sanctions against the Tandja government soon announced: namely, the suspension of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and of economic partnerships by the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and many Western countries.

But if extraversion is a common characteristic of the African state, so too is its opposite, introversion. That is, the political reality of African states is characterized by "code switching" (Rottenburg 2005) between an extroverted script or hegemonic "meta-code", and an introverted script or "cultural code", depending on the "bazaar situation" in which political actors find themselves at the time, that is either negotiations with international donors about foreign investment and development aid or with domestic clients about a redistribution of resources and political positions. In a bazaar situation to secure financial flows from the outside, Nigerien politicians change into the meta-code dominated by western political rationalities of good governance and transparency and a particular Western understanding of liberal representative democracy (multiparty systems, and freedoms of the press, speech and human rights). However, in a bazaar situation of internal redistributions of rents, public markets and political positions, political actors switch into a cultural code, a "vernacular understanding of democracy" through which they try to address the needs and desires of their national population to acquire legitimacy (Michelutti 2007). The spread of multiparty systems and democratic constitutions around the world therefore does not necessarily lead to the emergence of democratic principles. Rather, it should shift our

attention to how the language of democracy has been translated by political authorities in different cultural contexts (Schaffer 2000).

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

My thanks to all those present here. Men and women, young and old, we got what we have wanted for 51 years. It is thanks to God that we have oil in Diffa, and it is thanks to him that we have gathered here in Diffa [...] Currently there are many rumors circulating in our country. I would like to tell you what is really happening before leaving here today [...] I have played the same games that past presidents have played. Now it is time to work, because at my age I should react on the basis of calculation, to advance my country by implementing the projects that I have promised my people. This is my only goal. I want first of all to see our country actually produce oil. Like that, even after my death, you will say that this has been achieved in my era [...] In terms of uranium, we have always been given what they [Areva, ‘the French’ or ‘the West’ in general] want – sometimes five billion francs [XOF], sometimes four billion francs [XOF]. I said ‘No’ to that. I said that from now on both of us will have their fair share. Thus, I will review all uranium treaties and if they refuse, I will launch an international tender. For those reasons, the people who are responsible for this [the unfair distribution of the uranium profits] are those who tell the Africans to overthrow me if they find an opportunity. You [the political opposition in Niger and ECOWAS] tell the West that I became a dictator, but this is normal [appropriate to become independent] because it is my country, and I am independent [...] Our brothers who seek to sabotage us with our enemies are wasting their time. Our constitution is ours. It is our opinion, our point of view [the constitutional change]. All the great men of this world [leaders who opposed the West] had problems [with Western interference] but let them do what they do [independent decisions such as constitutional change]. We have our independence, and we do what we want [...] Wherever there is oil, there are problems that you have to resist. All the inhabitants of Diffa, I entrust our oil to you. We must pay attention and everyone who is suspect to you – inform us in time. We are working with the Chinese, and everyone knows them as soon as he sees them, doesn’t he? When you see someone who is not Chinese you have to inform us to ask what he’s doing. If he comes to Niamey, we will interrogate him, and he will remain in Niamey.³⁵ You have to pay attention; we do what

³⁵ When I presented myself to the governor of Diffa with a mission order from a Nigerien research institute to do research on natural resources in May 2011, he immediately called the chief of police and

we want with our oil. Everyone manages his wealth, and we too will do what we want. No man can keep his head up if he has nothing. This is not the time to blackmail us. Now is the time to work and we will do what is best for our country.³⁶

In this introverted speech, Tandja drew on a narrative of neocolonial interference. Firstly, he referred to unfair mining and contractual regimes which had always favored Areva and France. In such anti-imperial narratives, foreign companies and Western countries are said to be the very reason for “underdevelopment” in Africa (Rodney 1972). Translating this narrative to Niger’s oil production, the oil endeavor has always been undertaken to exploit the former colonies and to ensure they remain underdeveloped and dependent. In the Nigerien vernacular then, foreign oil companies and Western countries (especially France) had long known about the country’s oil reserves but had prevented development of them to keep them for their own future needs. According to this cultural code, the problems associated with oil are therefore not the result of internal dynamics like bad governance and corruption as the meta-code – the neoliberal “governance curse” – would have it, but rather the result of external exploitation, neocolonial interference and global warring.

Secondly, Tandja presented himself as a strong leader able to resist neocolonial interference by ending the unfair allocation of uranium revenues. As such, after 51 years of oil exploration in Niger, Tandja claims to have finally prepared the ground for oil production. In response to Niger signing the oil contract with a Chinese company, the CNPC, the West was trying to prevent oil development to maintain Niger’s dependence on them. One of those strategies was interference in national politics, which went as far as to include *coups d’états*. In referring to the great men, Tandja attempted to align himself with African leaders such as Sankara and Lumumba, who were brought down by the West or with the help of their intelligence agencies, and who have (re)gained significant popularity in Niger (and in Africa more generally). Moreover, with China focusing its diplomatic and ideological efforts on distinguishing itself from “Western paternalism”, “exploitation” and “neocolonial interference” by proclaiming “equal partnerships”, “pragmatism”, “win-win relationships” and “non-interference” (Taylor 2006), Tandja (re)produced and politically exploited the difference between “China” and “the West” for his campaign to justify the renunciation of Western countries, his rapprochement to China, his constitutional amendment to stay in power, and to denunciate the political opposition.

The speech is a good example of the logic of code-switching in Nigerien politics. As long as revenues continue to come from the outside, weaker Nigerien political players do not question the hegemonic meta-code of the more powerful Western players,

expelled me from the region to return to Niamey due to unauthorized research on oil (Schritt 2015a).

³⁶ Translation from Hausa with my research assistant Ali Adam Maman Sani. The speech can be found on YouTube: “Tandja Mamadou Diffa 2009”, posted by Mansour Elh Amani (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efUEHbjru50>).

as their money brings material gains (Rottenburg 2002). With sanctions interrupting financial flows from the West, Tandja increasingly articulated and politicized external relations and the conditions of international financial flows, thus pointing to Niger's dependency on and exploitation by the West. In this narrative, which fits well into the broader Nigerien vernacular and thereby reproduces it, the West intentionally leaves Africa underdeveloped. The only solution is a strong leader (even a dictator) who is able to stand against Western infiltration. This is also the logic behind the support given to the military junta by a large section of urban youth after the coup of 26 July 2023. For these young people, it is more important to reshape relations with the West on an equal footing than to cling to a "democratic" multi-party system that has long since lost its legitimacy in their eyes.

2.2 The Term of Salou Djibo (2010–2011)

On 18 February 2010, nearly two years before the first barrel of oil would finally be produced, Tandja was overthrown in a military coup led by Commander Salou Djibo. The military junta immediately suspended the new constitution, dissolved Tandja's government and all the institutions of the Sixth Republic, and installed a transitional governmental body, the Conseil Suprême pour la Restauration de la Démocratie (CSRD), which was headed by Djibo, who functioned as the head of state. In the junta's first official declaration, it was announced that they were not interested in political power, but rather in transforming Niger into an example of democracy and good governance (Grégoire 2010). The junta's external communications were thereby clearly aligned with and well adapted to western political rationalities. Importantly, the coup instigators did not seek to banish party politics or well-established political actors, rather they offered them the opportunity to re-enter the game after Tandja had monopolized power and threatened their future access to state resources. In this way, the main actors were all interested in regime change and the staging of new elections in a short space of time.

While official international reaction to the coup was both limited and restrained, most major actors verbally condemned it to some extent. Both the AU and ECOWAS temporarily suspended Niger's membership. Behind closed doors, however, the international community seems to have been largely satisfied, and rather than sharply denouncing the coup, called for a quick transition to democracy. The fact that the international response to the coup was in general muted, and that the junta was soon invited to international meetings suggests that the denunciation was based rather on principle than in fact (van Walraven 2011). In this sense, one of the junta's main missions was to reestablish ties with international donors, especially the EU, which had been cut due to *Tazartché*. Therefore, the CSRD soon began preparations for new democratic elections and pointed out that the transitional government would not be eligible to compete. And already in May, its main donor, the EU, decided to progressively resume budgetary support for Niger. However, before new elections could be

organized, the CSRD argued that they needed to “clean up the political situation” (*assainir la situation politique*) and to reconcile the nation. Under the slogan *assainissement* (cleansing), the CSRD conducted an anti-corruption purge of politicians and cracked down on several high-ranked government officials, all personal appointees of Tandja. With the reconciliation of the nation, it seemed that Djibo first of all meant the divisions caused by *Tazartché* or the political competition in multi-party systems more generally. At the end of July, the CSRD organized a *mini-conférence nationale*, which was attended by about 200 representatives from Nigerien political parties and civil society. Djibo opened the session by addressing the public debates over the previous weeks. With its introverted character, his speech in French illustrates several important aspects of the Nigerien vernacular around democracy.³⁷

First, in his introduction, Djibo addressed political opponents, accusing them of being absent at his speech, and using the media to denounce his regime instead:

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

This statement shows that Djibo sees a multiparty system, one with free access to the private media, not so much as a vehicle for a necessary pluralist public debate in a democracy, but rather primarily as a medium misused by political opponents to stir up opinion against the government and to incite social unrest. Indeed, those who publicly voiced opinions against the military government or demanded the liberation of Tandja were targeted by the police for “disturbing public peace” and “plunging the state into tension”. Djibo’s view of democracy is widely shared amongst Nigeriens who tend to see multiparty politics primarily as a dirty game with an infinite cycle of conflicts, rivalries and discord (Olivier de Sardan 2017). These political games create a negative image of the political sphere in general and have created a nostalgia for the military dictatorship of Seyni Kountché (*ibid*), which is also reflected in the support for the military junta of General Abdourahamane Tchiani after his coup on 26 July.

Second, Djibo turned to focus on cleaning up politics:

Some people think that we should not engage in cleansing because everybody is rotten. Yes, everyone is rotten, but there are some who are more rotten than others. We began the cleansing, and we will complete the cleansing, *in schā'allāb*³⁸.

³⁷ Video recording exchanged via mobile phone. Own transcription and translation from French.

³⁸ *In schā'allāb* is an Arabic phrase commonly used in Niger. It means “if God wills” but is used colloquially in the sense of “hopefully” by everyone, regardless of whether the person is religiously pious or not.

You cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs, and if it is required that we break them, we will break them – that is for sure.

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

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

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

Under the new electoral code and constitution, candidates would have to be aged between 35 and 70, have some higher education and provide a financial deposit. Djibo addressed critics of the code, which claimed it was elitist and did not take the socio-economic realities of the country into consideration, arguing that the drafts were not the responsibility of the military junta but of the political class. In effect, the electoral code and the constitution were designed to privilege and protect the small politico-economic class of Niger. They had been educated in the same schools and all knew each other, had all emerged during the National Conference in 1991, had aged together over the last 25 years, and all belonged to the “big families” of Niger (Olivier de Sardan 2017).

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

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

The notion of PAC is frequently evoked in Niger, for it is common knowledge that it is essentially impossible to find a job without connections through family, friends and acquaintances. This situation leads to a high level of frustration and a general rejection of the multi-party system, especially among young people, who, even with a high level of education, have little chance of getting a job without political connections. However, Djibo also points to the criteria of responsibility in the distribution of positions. Djibo's argument thereby rests on the assumption that responsibility and close relationships are intimately intertwined, that only through personal relationships can we know if someone will work responsibly. This illustrates the "normative double-binds" in African states that tie state bureaucrats both to official norms such as responsibility and the meritocratic distribution of positions, and to social norms like gift-giving, solidarity and redistributive accumulation within social networks (Bierschenk 2014).

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

In September 2010, Djibo spoke at the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York.³⁹ Djibo spoke first about the political situation in Niger, arguing that the military had the obligation to intervene to stop President Tandja's anti-constitutional behavior. He repeated the position of the CSRD, that they were not seeking power but wanted to preserve the unity and integrity of the country, asserting that the coup had been welcomed by the Nigerien population. According to Djibo, the four primary objectives of the CSRD were to restore democracy, to "cleanse" the political elite, improve the economic situation, and to achieve national reconciliation. He presented a roadmap for the transition to democracy and called for urgent international support in the transition process, before emphasizing the CRSD's democratic actions: setting up an anti-corruption commission and a high-level authority for reconciliation, working to consolidate democracy, and making a commitment to "universal values of peace, security, good neighborly relations, human rights, the rule of law, democracy and international solidarity".

³⁹ Transcript published by the *Présidence du Conseil Suprême pour la Restauration de la Démocratie* (2010).

After attempting to legitimate the military regime to the member states, Djibo then set about outlining a set of crises⁴⁰ that could only be addressed with financial aid from the member states. Djibo first turned to another key issue of the time: food insecurity in Niger. Djibo argued that the Tandja regime had downplayed the gravity of the situation in denying an insecurity, and that Niger was in fact in a food crisis and called for international help to gather 30 million USD to address the situation. Turning to terrorism, drug trafficking and the proliferation of arms in the Sahel-Saharan region, Djibo also called on the international community to immediately strengthen development cooperation, warning that poverty and despair would only serve to fuel terrorism in the region, before stressing that Niger would need substantial financial support from the international community to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Djibo then turned his attention to natural disasters, environmental degradation and climate change, once more calling on international funding to implement countermeasures. Finally, he emphasized his government's commitment to and achievements in the name of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

As we can see, in contrast to the introverted speech for a national audience in July, Djibo's extroverted speech at the United Nations was clearly well adapted to western political rationalities. The topics were chosen according to an international agenda of development, democracy, terrorism, climate change, human rights and gender equality; topics that hardly played a role in his introverted speech. After stressing Niger's commitment to "universal values", he underlined the need for international funding and support. As a whole, extroverted speech and action in Nigerien politics highlight the centrality of external rents in the functioning of the Nigerien state. To capture these financial flows, Nigerien leaders – as all political leaders to some extent but especially those who are in a weak position internationally – play the game of code switching by addressing an international audience in a different manner than they would address a national audience. While Djibo's introverted speech was characterized by vernacular notions of democracy and corruption, representing the former as inherently disorderly and the latter as an inescapable element of the social fabric, his extroverted speech addressed a western political understanding of democracy and good governance by implementing mechanisms of transparency and anti-corruption policies to call for international assistance.

2.3 The Term of Mahamadou Issoufou (from 2011)

Less than one year after seizing power, Djibo had organized new elections with Mahamadou Issoufou becoming new President of Niger in April 2011. In his inaugural speech in French in front of an international audience, which was also broadcast on

⁴⁰ Olivier de Sardan (2023) recently identified eight crises plaguing the Sahel. These are an agro-pastoral crisis, an employment crisis, a crisis of the political elite, a crisis of public services, a crisis of Islam, a crisis of Western centrism, a crisis of security and a crisis of national armies.

Nigerien state television, he first described the relationship between the exploitation of natural resources and national development as follows:⁴¹

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

In arguing that the exploitation of natural resources is essential to the nation's development and future generations, and that this exploitation cannot be achieved without foreign investors, Issoufou is seeking to portray himself as a beneficent and therefore legitimate leader to the Nigerien population and the international community. As legitimate rule cannot be built on the perpetuation of terror and fear in a democratic setting, Issoufou has to portray the country's resource exploitation as contributing to public welfare (Foucault 1991). According to this conception then, Issoufou argues that public welfare can only be achieved by foreign investments: the financial and technological demands of much natural resource exploitation, especially oil exploitation, means it cannot be achieved by the Nigerien state alone.

Issoufou then draws parallels to negative significations of resources as "curses", curses that can only be overcome by good governance (Humphreys, Sachs, and Stiglitz 2007).

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

Here Issoufou demonstrates his awareness of international political rationalities, addressing these rationalities to demonstrate his commitment to the neoliberal ideal of "good self-governance" (Anders 2005). Eager to reestablish the economic partnerships suspended under Tandja and to develop new ones, Issoufou is demonstrating his willingness to implement the forms of governance that Western donors (the EU, IMF and World Bank in particular) make conditional for funding. To illustrate this commitment to transparency and good governance, Issoufou would soon create anti-

⁴¹ Own translation from a transcript of Issoufou's inaugural speech published in *Perspective Monde* (Issoufou 2011).

corruption institutions. Critics, however, pointed out that these initiatives were not practically implemented, leaving these institutions ineffectual. However, the fact that these institutions were toothless was effectively irrelevant, their existence was enough to once again allow foreign powers to legitimize their involvement in the name of development. In this sense, Issoufou's extroverted strategy was extremely effective. In continuity with what Djibo had started, this was a line that they were following together to (re)gain international legitimacy, and again allow international donors and international companies to access the country. Indeed, after coming to power, foreign aid once again started to flow into the country, with a number of international donors resuming the suspended economic partnerships or creating new ones.⁴²

In his inaugural speech, Issoufou also addressed the Nigerien population, promising fair distribution of resource revenues to provide better access of education, healthcare and water. In doing so, Issoufou employed a distributive concept of development that promises material redistributions rather than trickle-down, a concept much closer to the Nigerien vernacular than the neoliberal good governance discourse. The "distributive state" of al-Qaddhāfi's Libya with extensive fuel subsidies and social programs (Vandewalle 1998) enjoyed high popularity in Niger. Similarly, with the beginning of oil production, the population in Niger was starting to demand a share of national wealth. Unlike the occasional distribution of gifts prior to national elections or at commemorative events that are well-known in Niger, this wealth was expected to be delivered as ongoing fuel subsidies in an attempt to make the state beneficent in the public perception. The first phase of his Issoufou's presidency was thus marked by labor unions and civil society organizations protesting against a fuel price deemed too high. However, the protesting labor unions and civil society organizations were denounced by the new Issoufou regime as part of the political opposition. While those civil society associations who had supported *Tazartché* had been removed from governmental bodies by the Issoufou government, they were replaced by those who had supported the former political opposition against Tandja (Abdoul Azizou 2010). Indeed, the Issoufou government created so many advisory positions for its supporters, especially university intellectuals, that it became a "state of advisors" (Adjji 2014).

Taken together, Issoufou's inaugural speech can be viewed as what Apter (2005) calls a "politics of illusion". Looking at neighboring Nigeria, Apter outlines how political actors manipulate signs and symbols of oil to promote nation building and to manufacture the consent of the population. Like these political actors, Issoufou also links resource exploitation to the promise of concrete material rewards, thus creating hope, expectation and ultimately illusion among the population. This creation of hope, expectation and illusion can be understood as constructing a myth around re-

⁴² The Banque Ouest Africaine de Développement (BOAD) granted loans for road construction, irrigation projects and energy programs; the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) financed rural development programs; a Chinese company agreed to construct a second bridge across the Niger River in the capital; the World Bank's International Development Association granted assistance for social safety; the EU granted budgetary support; the IMF provided assistance for farmers hit by poor harvests; and Niger's membership in ECOWAS and the AU were also restored.

source-led development. In this myth, the state attributes itself almost magical powers to ultimately and profoundly change the fate of the people, and of the nation itself (Coronil 1997). In line with the introverted character of the game, such mythmaking primarily takes place on the national level. If these promised future material achievements do not eventuate, the signs and symbols become increasingly discrepant with social reality, leading to disillusion and despair (for the case of Chad see Seign-Goura 2017). It was in this context of anticipation that the oil refinery was inaugurated in late November 2011. I turn to that in the next chapter.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to answer whether the political dynamics around the anticipation of oil production in Niger display transformations induced by the oil itself, or if they rather display general features of an African state. I have illustrated how oil was received as a new element of power in an already well-structured national political arena. Tandja's attempt to change the constitution dated back to a political conflict which began in 2004, when he and Prime Minister Hama Amadou began fighting for control within the MNSD party. Instead of simply following the logic of the resource curse thesis and assuming that oil was the root cause of *Tazartché*, it seems more appropriate to understand this as part of a broader, more complex and ongoing power struggle.

Moreover, in analyzing political rhetoric and practice in Niger's political game, this chapter speaks to the debate on African politics and the state by showing the importance of code-switching between an extroverted meta-code and introverted cultural code. I have shown that Nigerien presidents highly rely on tapping international financial flows for which they normally switch into the language of democracy to please their foreign patrons. However, at times when (Nigerien) presidents feel to be in a position of power or once international financial flows have been cut, they can produce accusations of neocolonial interference to blackmail international patrons for access to rents or to produce legitimacy within their country. This happened for example in 2007, when the spot price for uranium skyrocketed and an international competition for Niger's uranium reserves enlarged Tandja's room for maneuver and in 2009 when foreign aid was cut due to his attempt for constitutional change. Attesting to the immediacy of the colonial history of *Françafrique*, one which often raises questions about surreptitious French involvement in Nigerien politics, such narratives of neo-colonialism, directed at the domestic population, are popular in Niger and may explain support for the military junta in 2023 which draws on strong anti-French rhetoric and practice to build domestic legitimacy. However, domestic legitimacy is also built on the ability to provide service delivery and redistribute resources among the wider population. With Niger having a very tight budget that does not allow to satisfy a large part of the population or build a social security system, such a redistribution of resources and positions always favors only a small group of supporters which in turn

leads to highly politicized public institutions. As a result, politics in Niger are largely understood among the wider population as a dirty game of rivalry, conflicts and self-enrichment. The question is therefore how long the new junta's popularity in Niger can last in a context of rising prices and non-payment of wages.

Such an analysis questions both the long standing culturalist paradigm of (neo-) patrimonialism and neoliberal good governance in (Western) African studies as well as the (African) critique of neocolonialism. In analyzing and contextualizing introverted and extroverted presidential speeches, I have indeed shown that the political game is both deeply entangled in translocal power relations and financial flows and in internal redistribution patterns of these rents among domestic clients. These relations make code switching depending on the introverted or extroverted negotiations a major characteristic of the political game. Placing Niger in the asymmetric web of transnational relations of the world economy and politics, we should not adhere to absolute viewpoints: not by overemphasizing the claim that African states have foregone their agency by making themselves dependent on international financial flows (Bayart 2000), and not by arguing that African agency has been left null and void by Western domination and dependencies (Rodney 1972). Rather, as African states and their leaders are always inextricably entangled in national and international bazaar situations, agency is invariably deeply relational and multicentric. In this sense, a trade-off emerges: While African states in the international system are structurally in a weaker position, they are indeed able to capitalize on this position in accessing international financial flows thereby enlarging their internal (financial) room for maneuver. Such a political move, however, might produce critiques within the country of making a deal with former colonial powers questioning the government's political legitimacy in the national sphere. On the other hand, African governments can politicize external relations as neocolonial to blackmail international partners for rents or produce legitimacy in the national sphere. Cuts on international financial flows, however, largely decrease their internal room for maneuver, for example, in building clientelist networks to stay in power.

3 Talking Oil

While Tandja had used the oil refinery's 2008 foundation stone ceremony in Zinder to launch his campaign for constitutional change, the 2011 inauguration ceremony became the theatre in which political conflicts were played out. Building on the analysis of Niger's macro-politics from 2008–2011 in the previous chapter, this and the following chapter dissect the successive phases of a “political drama” around the inauguration of the oil refinery in late 2011 (Swartz, Turner, and Tuden 1966): from the mobilization of political capital, into a showdown, to a crisis and then to mechanisms of redress and the restoration of peace. The different phases of the drama illustrate how significations of oil, (anticipated) material effects of the extractive infrastructure and the distribution of oil revenues became part of the everyday micro-political game in the very moment of Niger entering oil-age. Political players used the national and international attention on the refinery's inauguration to position themselves within the political arena. In this chapter, I take a closer look at these actors, their political positions and their “oil talk” to better understand the first phase of the political drama: the mobilization of political capital.

3.1 Engaging on the Public Political Stage

In late 2011, everyday politics in Zinder turned around the November 28 inauguration of the oil refinery. Political actors including Zinder's regional and municipal councilors, government representatives, opposition politicians, businessmen and civil society activists released media statements and organized debates on private radio stations. With Zinder being the stronghold of the political opposition at the time (CDS-Rahama and MNSD-Nassara), most argued that the Zinder population would not reap the benefits of the refinery and would be left to bear the brunt of its development through environmental damage and land expropriation. Especially since article 146 of the Nigerien oil law (*code pétrolier*) that prescribed the redistribution of 15 percent of the oil revenues to the affected *région* only envisaged compensation for the extraction zone, Diffa, and not for the zone of refinement, Zinder, they demanded compensation and benefits for the Zinder region and its population. In fact, the Société de Raffinage de Zinder (SORAZ) is legally considered one of the *grandes industries*, and therefore has to transfer their taxes and fees – more than 4 billion XOF/month (6,097,960 Euro) – to the Direction Générale des Impôts du Niger in Niamey. Political players in Zinder linked this perceived injustice to the historical political marginalization of the Zinder region and accused the Issoufou government of favoring the capital Niamey and Zarma ethnicity. However, by engaging in public debates about the (anticipated) impact of the oil refinery in Zinder and drawing on particular narratives of Zinder's colonial and postcolonial history, I will show in the following that they did so mainly to gain legitimacy and to mask their own, typically politically and class-based, interests.

3.1.1 The *Élus Locaux* in Zinder

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

With the construction phase nearing completion, those local, unskilled laborers who had been recruited to build the plant would no longer be needed. Indeed, by the time of the press release, these local laborers (primarily young men) were already complaining about being laid-off en masse. In the operational phase, only about three hundred highly qualified young university graduates in petro-chemistry and mechanics would be needed for maintenance, surveillance and refining; and as education, especially university education, is primarily a matter of financial resources, these workers would necessarily come from the country's elite. In other words, those young men in Zinder qualified to work at SORAZ would have had little connection with the *palais* street gangs, so it seems unlikely that the regional committee created to supervise the recruitment process had any actual intention to ensure that youth gang members found employment there. Rather, by claiming and guaranteeing the recruitment of *Zindérois* in the name of the local population, councilors primarily created the supervisory committee to ensure that their own children and their extended families would have access to employment opportunities at SORAZ.

In a similar vein, the distribution of directorial positions in Niger is a matter of political affiliation, with party members being recompensed with influential positions and other spoils after the accession to power (Olivier de Sardan 2016). In this context, claiming these posts for *Zindérois* is therefore claiming these posts for themselves, the local elected representatives (*élus locaux*). Rather than seeking to calm threats of violence or social disorder by directly appeasing local youth, the committee was operating within the political logic of postcolonial Niger to guarantee their own – and by extension their families' – participation in the oil industry. However, by extending their own exclusion and loss of opportunity to the entire Zinder population, they labelled the distribution of directorial positions a collective injurious experience, thereby masking their own class and personal interests in the language of regional and ethnic belonging. Moreover, in framing their own interests in ethnic and regional terms, and with the means to employ networks of financial distribution, the committee had delivered the government a (veiled) threat, that they would seek to unleash youth violence and social disorder should their demands not be met.

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

Locally elected representatives made a press statement and organized several debates on radio and TV Gaskia to protest against the non-recruitment of young

people from Zinder. The Chinese understood and took their children. Since then, the Chinese have had their peace. (Agent of SORAZ, June 2013 quoted in Harouna 2014:62, own translation)

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

3.1.2 Dan Dubai and the MPPAD

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

Having established a historical narrative, the MPPAD press release then followed the logic of “naming, blaming and claiming” (Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat 1980–1981). According to Felstiner, Abel and Sarat, disputes develop through three stages: a perceived injurious experience (naming) is attributed to the fault of another (blaming) and is used to then ask for some remedy (claiming). Firstly, the MPPAD named a series of grievances based around oil, including corruption and (anticipated) damage to the environment and the population’s health. They accused (blamed) the newly elected government authorities of breaking the promise to develop health infrastructure, and of poor governance, political patronage and the marginalization of the Zinder region with respect to possible oil benefits. The statement also harshly rejected the initial recruitment process to fill leading positions at SORAZ, which it judged “sectarian”, “ethnic” and “politically motivated”, and demanded (claimed) that the oil minister recall the appointees (Mouvement Populaire pour la Pérennisation des Actions du

Développement 2011:3). By doing so, the MPPAD primarily developed grievances to blame the incumbent government, saying “those who will do harm, rob and plunder are not Chinese, they are Nigerians” (Mouvement Populaire pour la Pérennisation des Actions du Développement 2011:4). The declaration ended with the MPPAD calling on the population to mobilize against the new government. In other words, apart from demanding that Issoufou and Minister of Oil and Energy, Fomokoye Gado, recall the directorial nominations at SORAZ, the MPPAD did not make any concrete claims. Rather, they appealed to the public to mobilize against the government and shipwreck the regime. To understand this appeal, let us briefly turn to the background of the MPPAD.

The president of the MPPAD was Aboubacar Mounkaila, an extremely wealthy businessman who was publicly known as Dan Dubai⁴³, and who claimed to have made his fortune as a broker in the Dubai oil business. Claiming to be of eastern Nigerien belonging and Kanuri ethnicity, Dan Dubai told me that he had represented West African migrants in Dubai looking to make connections by organizing meetings and business relations for a commission. After living most of his life in Dubai, he had returned to Niger in 2007 when Tandja’s government was looking for new commercial partners in oil exploration and production; that is, after Esso and Petronas had abandoned the Agadem oil block in 2006, but before the government had reached the 2008 production sharing agreement with the CNPC. In Niger, Dan Dubai is regarded as the founding father of *Tazartché*, having founded the MPPAD to speak in the name of the Nigerien population by supporting Tandja’s bid to remain in office. With his financial power, Dan Dubai was able to mobilize the *Zindérois* population to give Tandja a glamorous reception at the foundation stone ceremony. Dan Dubai also became an affiliate of MNSD-Nassara. In understanding the electoral logic of postcolonial Nigerien politics, his strategy appears clear. In this political game, wealthy businessmen provide financial support for electoral campaigns, and are reimbursed afterwards with posts or public markets (Olivier de Sardan 2016). Had *Tazartché* succeeded, Dan Dubai would almost certainly have been recompensed with either a foothold in the Nigerien oil business or a position within the government. The military coup, however, had left him empty-handed. After former opposition leader Issoufou came to power in 2011, Dan Dubai became a member of the political opposition, while those who went on to form the oligopoly of the Nigerien oil and transport business were said to be financiers of Issoufou’s electoral campaign.

MPPAD’s statement is therefore to be seen as part of a personal (and broader) political project to undermine the government’s legitimacy and to find a position for Dan Dubai in Nigerien (oil) politics and business. Indeed, whether it was realistic or not, MPPAD’s political project may even be interpreted as the overthrow of the incumbent government by popular uprising, and preparation for Dan Dubai’s own candidature for the presidency. To pursue this goal, the MPPAD engaged in organizing

⁴³ Meaning the “Son of Dubai”, the name Dan Dubai can also be seen as a celebration of wealth and success.

resistance on the public stage in the weeks around the refinery's inauguration. They organized urban youth into so-called *comités de défense* in every quarter of Zinder city. The leader of each group was given direct orders by the MPPAD, which he was to pass down to his subordinates. Through this urban anchoring, Dan Dubai was able to mobilize the *Zindérois* population against the arrival of Issoufou, which I will elaborate on later. In pursuit of his ultimate goal, the presidency, Dan Dubai wanted to create *comités de défense* not only in Zinder but in all cities, villages and departments across the country. To finance an extension of his organization MPPAD through *comités de défense* all over the country, Dan Dubai also asked me to help him find Western resource companies to sponsor his campaign, in return, he would offer exploration or production permits should he win the elections.⁴⁴ Dan Dubai would later abandon his plans to stand in the elections.⁴⁵

3.1.3 CRAS

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

Before the first CRAS meeting in Zinder, I met a well-known civil society activist from the Réseau des Organisations pour la Transparence et l'Analyse Budgétaire (ROTAB) out front. ROTAB is one of the best-known civil society organizations in Niger working on the topic of extractive industries.⁴⁶ Earlier that day, I had interviewed him about his vision for the role of civil society in the country's oil future. There he

⁴⁴ Being from the German middle-class, I explained that I had no access to these large companies. Apart from my uneasiness with Dan Dubai's demand, his question points to an interesting aspect of Nigerian capitalism compared to Western capitalism, namely the ownership structure of large companies. Whereas large companies in the West are almost invariably owned by shareholders, Niger's largest companies are owned by individual businessmen, making entanglements between business and politics more personal and direct than in the West, where lobbying is the main form of brokerage.

⁴⁵ By early 2012, rumors had started that he lacked sufficient funds and was in a difficult financial situation. In March 2014, one of Dan Dubai's closest intimates told me that they were preparing to switch to support the Issoufou government. Some months later a newspaper article reported on the change (Mallan 2014), with Dan Dubai noticeably refraining from the public politics of naming, blaming and claiming. In the 2016 presidential elections, however, Dan Dubai surprised everyone by declaring his support for Mahamane Ousmane who, after his exclusion from the CDS, ran for the Mouvement Nigérien pour le Renouveau Démocratique (MNRD-Hankuri). Dan Dubai died in early 2020.

⁴⁶ The national coordinator of ROTAB in Niamey, Ali Idrissa, was publicly known to have close ties with the Lumana party which was part of the government at that time.

had explained that the task of civil society was to cooperate closely with government authorities to guarantee social peace and stability, to appease the population, especially violence-prone youth and the expropriated rural population, and to ensure that oil exploitation becomes a “blessing” and not a “curse”. Throughout the interview he had stressed the good relationship between civil society and the government authorities, pointing out that he was heavily involved in several governmental committees, including the organizational committee for the oil refinery’s inauguration ceremony, and therefore often visited the governorate. Seeing him at the meeting place, I asked him if he would be participating, to which he sharply retorted: “These are the people of *Tazartché*. We don’t do politics. We are not involved. In no way!”

During the meeting, the CRAS committee members were already naming the negative (travelling) ideas of oil production, including environmental pollution, conflict, and the lack of infrastructure and social development projects, especially in terms of better access to healthcare, water, and education. Criticizing the recruitment of oil workers from western Niger and of Zarma ethnicity, CRAS claimed that a quota of oil workers (60–70 percent) should come from the Zinder region. They also called for changes to the oil laws, so that Zinder would be included in the retrocession of oil revenues in compensation for its negative effects. Finally, they proposed a regional fuel price of 200 XOF/liter that had a base price in Zinder and was then augmented in relation to the costs that incur with the transportation from the refinery to the other depots. For them, this would be a way for everyone in Niger to profit from the oil production.

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

To understand these divisions, it is important to remember that Tandja’s campaign had largely split Niger’s civil society associations into supporters of *Tazartché* (so called *Tazartchists*) and opponents, who had joined the political opposition in

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

3.1.4 Non-Publics

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

Like these organizations, the Sultan only engaged with the public via radio when the violent protests around the inauguration erupted. Here, he did so only to calm the protests (see the next chapter on riots), as his own political situation was somewhat precarious. The sultan has maintained an important role in the political arena of postcolonial Zinder, although the position had been reduced to merely symbolic power under French colonialism. In 2001, under President Tandja, Sultan Aboubacar Oumarou Sanda was deposed and sentenced to two years imprisonment for fraud, receipt of stolen goods, and drug trafficking. Local political observers assert that the then sultan's dismissal was purely political, as he was associated with Issoufou's PNDS-Tarayya. Tandja replaced him with El Hadji Mahamadou Kakali Moustapha who was associated with CDS-Rahama, the political party of then President of the National Assembly Mahamane Ousmane, the then government coalition partner of Tandja's

MNSD-Nassara.⁴⁷ Only months after coming to power, however, President Issoufou reinstated Aboubacar Oumarou Sanda. With the inauguration, the sultan had a difficult balancing act, maneuvering between regional politics, through which he aimed to maintain popular support despite Zinder being the opposition stronghold (especially of the CDS-Rahama), and politics in favor of the government (to whom he owed his reinstatement). To do so, he tried not to take sides too clearly for the PNDS, but rather refrained from the public politics of oil. When speaking publicly, he tried to keep a moderate position and to speak in the name of Zinder region.

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

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

3.2 Talking Politics in the Language of Oil

With widespread poverty and illiteracy, the latter especially among the older generation, radio is a significantly more important medium than television and newspapers in contemporary Niger.⁴⁸ With regionally limited transmitter range, the radio stations in Zinder only cover the greater boundaries of the city. Nevertheless, many radio sta-

⁴⁷ From 1993–1996 Moustapha was a CDS member in the National Assembly.

⁴⁸ With limited access at the time, the internet had not yet developed into an important news source in Niger. This has changed in the last ten years.

tions also have a presence in other regions and exchange data files with other stations in other cities. Given its importance, it is not surprising that as the inauguration approached, political actors such as the regional and municipal councilors, government representatives, opposition politicians, businessmen and civil society activists began broadcasting interviews, releasing press statement and holding debates with increasing frequency on private radio. Civil society activists typically paid for airtime. CRAS members, for example, were charged 500–1000 XOF (0.76–1.52 Euro) to broadcast interviews, 2000–3000 XOF (3–4.6 Euro) to read out press statements, or 15,000–20,000 XOF (23–30 Euro) to organize debates, which lasted up to several hours. Consequently, those social actors who lacked formal recognition as members of political parties or civil society associations, and who did not possess the financial power to buy broadcasts were typically denied broadcasting access.

The radio debates generally lasted between one and two hours, took place either in French or Hausa, and were often repeated and broadcast in the other language the following day. Below I will outline two debates held in the lead-up to the inauguration: one between political players organized by radio station Anfani, and the other between civil society activists broadcasted by radio station Alternative. These debates illustrate how actors used the idiom of oil to frame their political projects and thereby actively constructed the social and political reality of contemporary Niger. This “oil talk” also demonstrates how the anticipation of oil, even in a state of not-yet-ness, profoundly affects political practices (Weszkalnys 2014; Witte 2018). In looking at these debates, I employ critical political discourse analysis to understand language use as social practice, thereby revealing how such practices of oil talk “arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power” (Fairclough 1995:132).

3.2.1 Anticipating the Fuel Price Fix

The following radio debate between a group of civil society activists was held two weeks prior to the refinery’s inauguration.⁴⁹ In one sense, this debate was not a debate as such, with most of the featured activists coming from the civil society organizations and labor unions of Zinder that had fused into CRAS. In the “debate”, they discussed what the government fixed fuel price would be. At the time, fuel smuggled from Nigeria was being sold in the streets of Zinder for about 350 XOF/liter (0.53 Euro/liter), while the official fixed fuel price at the petrol stations was 679 XOF/liter (1.04 Euro/liter). Moreover, rumors had already begun to circulate that the Issoufou government would announce a fixed price of more than 500 XOF/liter (0.76 Euro/liter), whereas Tandja had promised a fixed price between XOF 200 and 250/liter (0.30–0.38 Euro/liter).

I here present excerpts of the actors’ statements⁵⁰ to illustrate how their positions within the political arena shaped the way they framed the topic of oil, and how their

⁴⁹ Recording of Radio Alternative 13.11.2011.

⁵⁰ The debate was held in Hausa. My friend and research assistant Ali Adam Maman Sani and I translated them into English.

statements were related to their political projects. The debate was hosted by Ali Djibo, a moderator on the most important associative community radio station in Zinder, *Alternative*. The guests were Sadat Elhadj Illia from the *Mouvement Patriotique pour la Défense de la Nation et du Peuple (MPDNP)*, Secretary General of the Transport Union in Zinder Issaka Elhadj Sani (aka Askia), sociologist and co-founder of the development organization *Mieux Vivre Sans la Fonction Publique* Abdoul Madjid, and Secretary General of the *MPPAD* Abdoul Kader.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As the quotes make clear, not only did each of the activists demand a fuel price lower than the price of the smuggled fuel from Nigeria, but each also strongly criticized the government for neglecting the population, especially of the Zinder region. The activists also demanded the opportunity to participate in the political decision-making process and accused those civil society associations which occupied seats on governmental bodies of cronyism and complicity with the incumbent regime. To better understand the four activists' backgrounds and motivations, in the following, I set out to situate the actors' claim-making according to their positioning within particular political constellations and power games, thereby revealing their own political projects. By highlighting the contextual factors that shaped the participants' mediatized oil talk, I will demonstrate how the political, regional and ethnic "politics of belonging" in Niger are central to understanding democracy and the media's role in promoting it (for the media and democracy in Africa in general see Nyamnjoh 2005). Two days before the debate, the activists had met to elaborate on ways to collaborate. Several days after the debate, they finally formalized their alliance in the *Comité Régional des Associations*

et Syndicats de la Région de Zinder (CRAS), with Sadat elected president, Abdoul Madjid vice president, and Askia head of communication. The MPPAD's Abdoul Kader did not opt for a formal position on the committee, but occasionally attended meetings to coordinate collective action between CRAS and the MPPAD, especially with the arrest of its leader Dan Dubai several days prior to the inauguration.

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

As secretary general of the transport union section in Zinder, Askia defended the interests of the transporters, whose profits were directly linked to the fuel price. Less known than Sadat as a civil society activist, Askia was rather known as a CDS-Rahama militant. As Zinder is the stronghold of the political opposition and the CDS in particular, the other CRAS committee members suspected Askia was gathering and delivering information to the CDS' Bachir Sabo, the mayor of Zinder. He was thus first of all a political opponent of the central government and a defender of transport union interests. His political project was said to be to support CDS politicians, and to benefit personally from their sponsorship.

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

Dubai. His position as vice president of CRAS was thus seen as an attempt to guide Zinder civil society to favor the MPPAD, and his personal project was said to be to benefit from Dan Dubai's wealth.

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

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

3.2.2 Debating the Prospects of the Oil Refinery

Held about a week prior to the inauguration, the following radio debate in French was hosted by Lawan Boukar, a moderator on a leading private Zinder radio station, Anfani.⁵¹ Three guests featured in the debate about the future of the Nigerien oil refinery: member of the incumbent national government party MODEN-FA Lumana Mahamandou Dan Buzuwa, member of the opposition CDS-Rahama and city councilor in Zinder Abdoulrahim Balarabé (aka BABI), and head of the civil society association Mouvement Populaire pour la Pérennisation des Actions du Développement (MPPAD) Dan Dubai. Their opening statements follow:

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

Dan Dubai: At the moment we can't speak about benefits. Let us first of all talk about the health of the people [...] Did you know that the water that will be used in the refinery will be sent to us for drinking? Who

⁵¹ Recording of Radio Anfani 20.11.2011.

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

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

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

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

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

As the quotes make clear, each of the politicians framed their statements in the name of Zinder region. Here we have to know that groups, associations or federations based on regional or ethnic identity have been officially banned since the 1960s, as have political parties based on ethnicity since 1991. Moreover, since former President Kountché

had prohibited any reference to ethnicity in public debates, those references are always framed as accusations against other groups. That is, it is always the political opponent who is pursuing ethno-regionalist politics, whereas the speaking party is only naming their practices.

In the statement, the MPPAD's Dan Dubai anticipated the negative effects of oil production in Zinder before the first barrel of oil had even been produced. In doing so, he made some outlandish claims, including that the refinery's used industrial water would be pumped directly into the drinking water system.⁵² Dan Dubai claimed that this negative outlook for Zinder and indeed Niger's oil future came from the knowledge he had acquired overseas, especially through his involvement in the Dubai oil business, implicitly warning of the resource curse eventuating by accusing the newly elected government of poor governance and political patronage. As his right-hand man told me, Dan Dubai's ultimate goal was the Nigerien presidency. His argument is thus to be seen as part of a personal (and broader) political project to undermine the government's legitimacy. To pursue this goal, the MPPAD engaged in organizing resistance for a resource curse scenario of oil-induced conflicts to materialize at the refinery inauguration.

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

Member of the Zinder government majority Dan Buzuwa also counted on the refinery's financial revenues. However, he rejected Dan Dubai and Balarabe's claims that the government was ethnically and regionally marginalizing Zinder, and rather that they were both being ethnocentric and regionalist. Buzuwa argued that a person's origin was not important, rather it was the knowledge and skills that were the important criteria in selecting personnel. Finally, he explicitly referred to the resource curse narrative to demand the population remain calm and allow oil production to become a blessing. In referring to the resource curse narrative, Buzuwa questioned his political opponents' legitimacy by implicitly accusing them of ethnic and regional populism, attempting to make them responsible should the "curse" eventuate.

The radio show illustrates how the emergence of a multiparty system has allowed debate to take place in a setting of political competition which is about the negotiation of disputes in the public. In this setting, the speech acts of "naming, blaming and

⁵² Of course, pollution of the drinking water is possible, but his claim that the used industrial water would be directly pumped into the drinking system seems far-fetched.

claiming” (Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat 1980–1981) are political moves. In this particular context, political players named oil related grievances, which they blamed on opponents, in order to claim political legitimacy and power for themselves and their political groups. It is striking how the resource curse thesis became integrated into these political disputes and was there translated from an analytical model into a political rhetoric carefully put to use in the political game. Depending on the actors’ interests, the threat of the curse either served to delegitimize the government by accusing them of making the resource curse a reality, or to delegitimize the political opposition by making them responsible for the very production of the curse itself.

As Mamdani (2007) argues, “naming” an object in a certain way has powerful political consequences, justifying interventions, reconstructing social and political difference, and thereby reinforcing patterns of domination. In the case of oil production in Niger, oil is named a “curse” to emphasize its negative effects, or a “blessing” to emphasize its positive effects. Naming oil in one way or another sets the scene for further stages of blaming and claiming. Drawing on Aristotle’s concept of epideictic oratory, Church’s (2010) heuristic analysis of the rhetoric of “blame” identifies three main strategies: the establishment of place, the creation of ethos, and the use of ekphrasis. The establishment of place enables the interaction of orator and audience, the creation of an ethos defines an epistemic and moral authority for the self and the other, and the use of ekphrasis rhetorically unveils an event to effect a call to action in the audience. Building on Church’s identification of these three strategies, we might first say that the establishment of place is related to media technologies. Diffused by private radio stations with transmission ranges extending only to the greater urban area, the oil talk targets a regional, mostly urban audience. Second, epistemic and oral authority is constructed around oil knowledge and notions of good governance, creating at least a discursive ethos, especially for well-established political players. Third, the oil talk which unveiled the event of Niger entering oil-age closes with calls to (non)action; either to rally against the government, or to stay calm to allow oil production to become a blessing. The translation of concepts like the resource curse into the local political arena through epideictic oratory is thus used for the politicization of every aspect of oil production. One may therefore argue that oil talk in a multi-party system with (relative) freedom of speech and the press has become talking politics in the language of oil. Oil is not instantly “cursing” democracy towards authoritarianism, conflict and corruption but is rather absorbed into the political logic of Niger’s democracy.

3.2.3 (Unaired) Subaltern Voices

In contrast to well-established players like the civil society representatives who occupy seats in governmental bodies and voluntarily refrain from the public sphere, the subaltern lack access to the radio landscape and the public. Although private radio stations broadcast press releases and organize debates, non-established political actors who lack formal recognition as civil society activists or politicians, as well as financial resources,

legal-political knowledge and political rhetoric, are largely excluded. Their voice is limited to sporadic citizens' interviews, talk-back radio or to paternalistic representatives from politics, civil society, law and so on.

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

Farmers whose land was expropriated for the oil refinery have even less of a voice than youth in the public political game. As such, they depend on lawyers and civil society activists to defend their cause or voice their concerns on radio shows about their situation. This is rare: I know of only one radio interview with expropriated farmers in 2011. In the interview, the two farmers discussed their suffering, stating that they had lost their fields and with it their "joy and hope had turned to fatigue and despair".⁵³ They appealed to the president for help, saying they had been told compensation payments had already been transferred by the government, but not who was to hand the payments over to them. In several focus group interviews with expropriated farmers that I conducted in villages close to the oil refinery in 2011 and again in 2014, they complained that after the construction phase of the oil refinery in 2011, their children (young men) had been laid off, some of whom had then migrated to Libya in search for work. With their children now out of work, the farmers did not see any positive impact from the oil refinery. Instead, they claimed a loss of soil fertility, as well as smoke and air pollution, and problems with security forces, as the Chinese had repeatedly accused their children of stealing scrap from the refinery area. Moreover, the farmers complained that none of the promised improvements to the health, water or educational infrastructure had been delivered. Finally, they criticized the government and civil society, as no representatives had ever visited them, or shown any real interest in understanding their situation.

Although government representatives had come to identify the affected farmers and measure the size of their expropriated fields, the farmers claimed that they had been told neither the results of the survey, nor how much compensation they were entitled to. They had been told only to wait. As the rural farmers had no financial means, two lawyers took up their case for compensation in 2011 on the condition of receiving 17 percent of any final indemnity payments. One of the lawyers had been a well-known civil society activist during the "movements against the high costs of living" in 2005 and had close relations with the CRAS leaders. During a CRAS meeting in Zinder in 2012, one of the members received a message that one of the expropriated

⁵³ In total 176 fields were taken by the state from eleven different villages situated near the oil refinery.

farmers was in the city, so a committee member was sent to pick him up. The man was asked to report on the situation of farmers near the refinery. After completing his report and being released from the meeting, CRAS members discussed if and how they could use the information in their political struggle. Although members appeared to agree that the farmer's grievances more or less fitted in with CRAS' political agenda, they did not air his grievances in public. When the expropriated farmers received their second of three compensation payments in 2014, only some of the money actually arrived. The lawyer with close relations to CRAS was soon accused of embezzling the money and arrested. Instead of defending and supporting the farmers who had accused the lawyer, CRAS members claimed the lawyer's arrest was political, and demanded his immediate release. Throughout the conflict, the expropriated farmers did not have a voice.

Women appear to have even less of a voice than male youth or farmers in the public sphere in Zinder. Nigerien society is highly gender segregated, a trend exacerbated by an increase of "wife seclusion", especially in southern-central Niger, in which women are kept in the private sphere inside the house/compound (Henquinet 2007).⁵⁴ As we have seen, none of the political actors in these public disputes were women. All CRAS members were men. Whereas members of civil society and the political opposition were claiming directorial positions for regional residents at SORAZ or a regional quota for oil workers, these were inherently male roles. Male political players in Zinder claimed to speak in the name of the entire regional population, but implicitly spoke only for (elite) men. Thus, with the existing structures of domination in a patriarchal setting, gender remains unspoken and invisible in the public political game in Niger today. Women's participation in the public debate is mainly restricted to fora of non-governmental organizations or to the fulfillment of quotas in national politics which are financed and encouraged by international measures for gender equality.⁵⁵ I turn to that again in more detail in the last chapter on the socio-political order of contemporary Niger.

3.3 Conclusion

As I have shown in the speeches and press statements of various political actors in Zinder, the concept of naming, blaming and claiming in legal disputes translates well into a political setting, so I reformulate and extend this concept as "the politics of nam-

⁵⁴ A relatively recent phenomenon now spreading amongst Hausa in particular, wife seclusion first emerged among the Alhazai, rich Hausa traders, as a marker of class and religious status. But with devastating droughts in the Sahel, population growth, increasingly scarce arable land, the fall of uranium revenues, and the introduction of the SAP, Islamic movements increased and with them, wife seclusion spread to rural households of varying economic status and with differing labor needs (for more on this see chapter 6).

⁵⁵ In 2015, the National Assembly adopted a law specifying a gender quota at 15 percent for candidate lists for the 2016 elections. In 2016, twenty-six women were represented in the National Assembly.

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

This is related to the media technologies with which voices are made public and political. The radio debates demonstrate how important private radio has become as a device in political player's tactical repertoire since its emergence and incorporation into the political arena in Zinder in 1997. As the debates have shown, radio is primarily used by established players to engage in the public political game, while generally ignoring subaltern voices who lack the financial and political resources to broadcast their narratives.

Oil talk is thus enacted in a double sense. Firstly, actors talk oil through the logic of their political agendas, which in turn shape their articulations of significations of oil. I have shown how the positioning of actors within the political arena shapes their agendas and thus frames oil accordingly in political debates. Secondly, to enact oil talk, political players need access to radio broadcasting. Thus, radio allows some actors to articulate their political views, while leaving others without this means of engaging in the public. Acknowledging socio-economic inequalities, I have shown that groups like unemployed youths, dispossessed farmers, and women were inhibited from gaining significant access. I have thus illustrated how access to the media is a critical condition for participation in the public, and how privileged access to the media is a means of domination for the most well-established and powerful actors. The double-layered enactment of talk and access to radio required to be an effective actor has produced a specific political logic in oil-age Niger. Understanding the particular character of the political dynamics of oil therefore only becomes possible by considering how radio and politics in Niger articulate. In this sense, radio has not only become an important device in the political players' tactical repertoire, but also shapes the way politics are played in Niger.

4 Rioting Oil

In this chapter, I turn to the production of violent protests around the oil refinery's inauguration as the subsequent phases of a political drama after the mobilization phase: the showdown, the crisis, mechanisms of redress and the restoration of peace.

The closer the inauguration day came, the more text messages voicing oil related grievances were sent out via mobile phones to incite social unrest. Written in either Hausa or French, the messages had started to circulate about two weeks prior to the inauguration, just after the government had announced the new fixed fuel price of 579 XOF/liter (0.88 Euro). The messages criticized the fuel price fix and attacked and accused the incumbent government of stealing, embezzling and plundering the country for personal profit. Other messages demanded a regional quota for *Zindérois* in the recruitment of oil workers, the realization of infrastructural projects, or environmental protection against oil pollution. Still other messages called on the population not to assist the refinery's opening ceremony.

They have officially declared war on us. We are at war, we need to unite to combat the enemy. And I remind you that at war the victors will be those who are the brave, and that is us.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 15 November 2011, translated from French.

Dear Nigerien brothers and sisters. Do you know that our leaders don't care about us, about our difficult lives, do you know that? And that Nigerien oil belongs to the Nigeriens? And not to the leaders! Together we say no! No to the plunderers, thieves, cheaters, to those who work for their own profits and not for the profit of the Nigerien people. Imagine that we are obliged to pay the subsoil resources of our ancestors at a colossal price (576 francs [XOF]) [sic.]. Please, my dear compatriots, this price, is it affordable for us Nigeriens? If not, let's mobilize together, hand in hand, and say NO!! PLEASE PASS ON THE SMS.⁵⁷

WE DO NOT AGREE – WHERE IS THE QUOTA FOR ZINDER PEOPLE IN THE RECRUITMENT? WHERE IS THE AIRPORT AND THE HOSPITAL TO PROTECT US FROM RADIATION AND POLLUTION? WHERE ARE THE TARMAC ROADS, THE CONGRESS CENTER? WE DON'T ACCEPT THE NOMINATIONS OF THE 9 ADMINISTRATORS OF SORAZ MADE ON AN ETHNOCENTRIC AND REGIONALIST BASIS.⁵⁸

We call on all Zindérois to avoid assisting the reception of President Issoufou for the ceremony of selling the fuel at the oil refinery of Zinder. Please pass this SMS to all Zindérois.⁵⁹

The system of chain messages was largely facilitated by a promotion of mobile phone provider Airtel that allowed users who sent a message with “BONJOUR” to any number to receive 100 free SMS until midnight that day.⁶⁰ Moreover, to avoid police

⁵⁷ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 15 November 2011, translated from French.

⁵⁸ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 21 November 2011, translated from French.

⁵⁹ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 23 November 2011, translated from French.

⁶⁰ Established in the country only shortly before in 2011 via an acquisition of Celtel (Netherlands), and later Zain (Kuwait), Airtel has reached a majority 68 percent market share by the time of writing. Generally, the Nigerien government has limited the number of telephone providers to four: Orange (France), Moov (Ivory Coast), Sahelcom (Niger state-owned; today Niger Télécom) and Airtel (India). With a SIM card costing 500 XOF (0.76 Euro) in 2011, Nigeriens mostly possessed SIM cards of all four or at least of three companies because the widely distributed Chinese mobile phone fabrications in Niger have three plug-in positions and thus allow communicating (short messages or phone calls) between the same provider which is substantially cheaper than communicating between different providers. At that time, for example, sending a short message between Airtel clients was only 1 XOF (0.0015 Euro) but between different providers it could have easily been 10 XOF (0.015 Euro) or more. In sum, because of the high capital cost but very low operating costs of mobile networks, infrastructure providers try to attract customers to their respective network with special offers to raise their market shares and thereby not only turn mobile phones inadvertently into devices for mass communication but also facilitate protest organization.

persecution, these short messages (which I was sent either directly by one of the text organizers or collected later from youth leaders), were initially sent from unregistered SIM cards.⁶¹ As a result, the police failed to track the source of the messages. It was, however, obvious that at least some had been strategically placed by political opponents – especially as the messages’ contents were nearly identical to political opponents’ media statements. At least some of the texting was the coordinated action of a small group of people: with one of the masterminds later telling me that five of them had written the texts together, a statement backed up by the fact that some messages had identical contents but different spellings. The strategy of the political opponents was thereby two-fold: on the one hand, they wanted the wider public to refrain from attending the opening ceremony, and on the other, they were attempting to mobilize certain groups to stage violent protest. The short messages thereby circulated especially among youth as they are both generally more literate to read the messages and more affected by the fuel price, with many working as *kabou kabou* (motorcycle taxi drivers), selling smuggled fuel from Nigeria on the streets, or smuggling contraband themselves.

4.1 Dan Dubai’s Arrest

On Friday 25 November, three days before the inauguration, Dan Dubai was arrested by the police of Zinder. While the official version stated that his arrest was for defaming the government in statements made during the radio debates and in the MPPAD press release (see previous chapter), talk in Zinder had it that the Issoufou government was afraid of Dan Dubai organizing resistance against the President’s arrival on inauguration day. But the arrest of Dan Dubai did not calm the situation. Quite to the contrary, that same evening, several youths called talk-back show *planète reggae* to discuss the arrest and government injustice in general. Similarly, short mobile phone messages called on the population to protest the following day.

ELHADJI DAN DUBAI IS IN JAIL AND HIS COMPANIONS ARE ON TRACK TO BE ARRESTED: THIS IS TO FRIGHTEN OTHER NIGERIENS WHO REACT AGAINST THE EXCESSIVE FUEL PRICE: APPOINTMENT TOMORROW AT 9 AM IN FRONT OF THE BUS STATION TO DEMAND THE RELEASE OF DAN DUBAI AND TO ENGAGE OUR LEGAL RIGHTS AS CITIZENS: SEND ON TO OTHERS.⁶²

⁶¹ Although SIM cards must normally be registered with the distributors when purchased, this is often not the case due to three main reasons: First, approximately not even one half of Niger’s population possesses identity cards. Second, the mobile phone companies promote their SIM cards also in rural areas where there are no electricity grids to allow for an electronic registration. Third, unregistered SIM cards can also be bought informally at the market outside of distributors’ shops.

⁶² SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 25 November 2011, translated from French.

The following day, November 26, about two hundred youth reputedly gathered at the bus station but were immediately dispersed by the police who had heard about the calls to protest. However, near the city's central tribune⁶³, school pupils also marched against the fuel price and the arrest. Police attempts to disperse the crowd devolved into a violent cat-and-mouse game between the protesters and police. Blowing a whistle, one student would gather the protestors together again and again, while police forces would rush along the streets, firing tear gas missiles at them, leaving the students to flee into schoolyards where they would immediately spread and hide. Part of a crowd of onlookers across the street, on police instructions I left the scene for my safety. Some of the others in the crowd claimed that the pupils had been mobilized by the political opposition to protest, something one of the organizers confirmed to me later, saying that he had "worked to fuel the protests".

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

4.2 The Inauguration Day

On November 28, the inauguration was held. Here, the mobilization strategy of political opposition groups was by-and-large effective, although people also came out to support the president. That day, urban youths demonstrated violently against the president's arrival. They built tire street barricades and set them alight, clashed with police, and attacked Issoufou's festive procession as it made its way to the refinery (see introduction).

A friend told me that his patron, a high ranked politician from the ruling PNDS-Tarayya party had given him 10,000 XOF (15.24 Euro) to join the welcome for the president, and that he had gone with about ten family members to the airport. A member of a motorcycle taxi labor union told me that a member of the PNDS had paid him and a group of about thirty *kabou kabou* 100,000 XOF (152 Euro) to wel-

⁶³ Every major city in Niger has a central tribune where public holidays and special events are celebrated.

come the president with a festive procession and to carry portraits of his likeness. They had done the same when Tandja had arrived for the foundation stone ceremony. This time, however, the *kabou kabou* had to stop their motorcade because they had been abused and feared being attacked. He claimed that around one thousand protestors had been creating havoc and destruction in the streets that morning. Another friend actually told me that he was among the organizers of the protests.

In Zinder there was widespread public disagreement about who was responsible for the violent youth protests. For some, the media was responsible, claiming that the radio debates incited the youth to violent action. For others, it was the short messages that mobilized youth, while others again suspected that the political opposition, especially the CDS-Rahama and the MPPAD, were behind the protests. Rumors circulated that opposition politicians had paid youth and well-known criminals to protest, and that they had also distributed them sling shots.

4.3 Towards Dan Dubai's Trial

In the days following the inauguration of November 28, more short messages aimed at mobilizing protesters against the government were sent out.

Down with the 7th Republic, down with the vampire government, down with the power of the Nigerien pharaohs, down with the fuel price of 578 francs [XOF] [sic.] and those who buy it, down with all those who don't send the SMS to 30 or 60 persons, they are not real citizens. *That Allah avenges us*⁶⁴

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

⁶⁴ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 29 November 2011, translated from French.

claimed that the governor had underestimated the power of the MPPAD, and that the governor would soon have to resign from office, as would President Issoufou, after what had happened in Zinder. Abdoul Kader would prove wrong on both counts.

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

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

4.4 The Trial of Dan Dubai

Ten days after the second act, the showdown of the inauguration day, politics in Niger turned to the third act, namely "the crisis" following Dan Dubai's trial. On December 5, the day before the trial, text messages calling on the public to attend the court case at the Zinder Tribunal were circulated. While sitting with members of a motor-taxi drivers' union at a *fada* drinking tea and discussing the protests around the oil refinery's opening, the union secretary general told me that many of the *kabou kabou* supported Dan Dubai's MPPAD. The MPPAD had opened the *kabou kabou*'s eyes, he said, by showing how the government would pocket the profits from the exorbitant

fuel price. Selecting the calculator function on his mobile phone, the secretary general calculated the refineries turnover per day by converting an oil price of 144 USD/barrel to XOF and multiplying that by the oil refinery's capacity of 20,000 barrels/day to come to a total of about 1.7 billion XOF/day (2.6 million Euro/day). With this "profit" (turnover) per day, as he said, there could be no valid reason for the government not to fix a lower fuel price. When I asked him whether he had heard about the court case the next day, he replied "of course" and added "everyone" would be there. He explained that militant youth followers of Dan Dubai's *comités de défense* – many of which were *kabou kabou* – had (been) organized through text messages indicating the date, time, and place to meet. That evening, I also received the following message:

DEMOCRACY OR DICTATORSHIP – THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE WILL BE JUDGED TOMORROW TUESDAY 6 DECEMBER AT 9 O'CLOCK. COME TO ATTEND THE TRIAL OF A MAN UNJUSTLY ARRESTED BY THE COWARDS IN POWER. THE ADVOCATE OF THE POOR, ELHADJI DAN DUBAI RAISED TO THE LIEUTENANT GENERAL OF THE OPPRESSED. RENDEZVOUS NOT TO MISS – CIRCULATE THE SMS.⁶⁵

Following the messages' call, over two hundred youths (mostly young men) had gathered in front of the court on the day of the trial. A political supporter of Dan Dubai approached me as I stood in the crowd, proudly telling me that they had mobilized the *kabou kabou*, students, and local youth to attend. He told me that he had visited Dan Dubai in prison the day before to inform him about the mobilization and his support, which Dan Dubai was grateful for. Moreover, he claimed that the arrest was a serious mistake by the authorities because now, like Nelson Mandela, Dan Dubai would become president after years of imprisonment. Referring to Gandhi, Martin Luther-King and Krishnamurti, the supporter claimed to favor non-violence, saying that "the people of Niger would stand up like those in the Arab Spring and overthrow Issoufou's regime". His claims of mobilization and support for Dan Dubai were however exaggerated: at least several of the youth at the courthouse were not militant supporters of the MPPAD (though they may have harbored sympathies for Dan Dubai). Rather, a number of youths, carrying their exercise books, were there to support a private school boy facing trial that morning for assaulting a teacher.

As the courtroom was already crowded, many youths were refused entry by security guards brandishing batons. The youths gathered in front of the court. As the trial started, Dan Dubai's supporters became louder, the noise interrupting proceedings, and forcing his lawyer to go outside several times to calm them. In the meantime, two police vans had arrived, each carrying about ten members of a rapid deployment force. They began dispersing the crowd onto the streets, where *kabou kabou* then started to

⁶⁵ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 5 December 2011, translated from French.



Figure 4.1: Inside the courtyard with only a part of the crowd. By this stage, the police and youth had started fighting in the streets. Photo: Jannik Schritt.

perform stunts on their motorbikes. Coincidentally, at the same time, the governor of Zinder was returning from an AIDS conference outside Zinder. When his cavalcade passed in front of the court, youths threw stones at it; and when more police arrived, the youths threw stones at them. The police immediately retaliated by firing tear gas into the crowd.

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

Shortly after the trial of Dan Dubai commenced, I was able to take the place of a CRAS member inside the courtroom. I listened to the allegations about several statements Dan Dubai had made in radio debates, in the MPPAD's media release, and even statements he had made during the Tandja regime. When Tandja had announced that Niger would soon become a new oil state, Dan Dubai had claimed that Issoufou had said that "everything is false, there is no drop of oil, there is only water". This claim against Issoufou took center stage. The prosecution also referred to statements Dan Dubai had made during *Tazartché*, who admitted that Tandja had asked him to

host a glamorous reception at the oil refinery foundation stone ceremony. Dan Dubai claimed that he had agreed on the condition that Bakin Birgi, the area of the oil refinery, was not to be destroyed by waste and water pollution. He then referred to Niger as a “democracy governed by the rule of law”. His acquittal was greeted with rapturous applause inside and outside the courthouse. Afterwards, his lawyer gave interviews to private radio stations, and Dan Dubai released a press statement honoring the integrity of the judiciary.

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

New information from Zinder. This Tuesday, 6 December, the man of people Elhadji Dan Dubai was declared innocent by the fair and honorable Nigerien justice. What a shame for the dictators in power! The same day, the national police intentionally hurt innocent school students at C.E.S Birni in their own class. There was 1 death and lots of severe cases of injuries. Is it just? Then stand up to against the police’s evil acts that allow them to kill humanity. You have the right to send this SMS to others. It is freedom of expression! The burial of this poor pupil already took place this evening at about 6 o’clock at the Muslim cemetery Birni. Pray God will grant clemency to martyrs.⁶⁶

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

4.5 USN Protests

On the morning of the following day, December 7, pupils, students and other youth blocked the arteries of urban Zinder life – building and burning barricades of tires at the squares, intersections, and main roads. They marched towards the criminal investigation department. As one of the participating youths would proudly say to me later, their aims were to burn down the police station and to kill policemen. When they did attack the commissariat with stones, however, a police officer in front of the station

⁶⁶ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 6 December 2011, translated from French.

fired three shots towards the crowd, killing an uninvolved woman passing-by. During and shortly after the protests, short messages continued coming through, some spreading misinformation to add fuel to the fire.

Late-breaking news, more than 100 police and army vehicles are on their way to Zinder. They are nearing Konni [474 km west of Zinder on the road from Niamey] and are coming to massacre the Zindérois. Circulate the sms.⁶⁷

What will be the reaction of the Zindérois towards the killing forces that are on their way to Zinder.⁶⁸

There is a police inspector called ANMANI who said this morning at the bus station in front of 2 policemen that ‘even if you shoot at 100 Zindérois nothing will happen’. Be careful. Circulate the message.⁶⁹

Throughout the history of Zinder, Damagaram has never been beaten – so cry out loud and clear ‘victory’, and that the struggle continues with the help of ALLAH (SWT)⁷⁰ and the prayers of our devoted marabouts.⁷¹

The messages harked back to a collective regional identity – of being *Zindérois* – to arouse emotions of historical political marginalization and rebellion. Although Zinder was actually beaten and conquered by the French in 1899, the messages glorify the *Zindérois* resistance. In Niger, Zinder is considered a city of rebellion and revolution which always fought against outside forces, be they French troops, or the (Zarma dominated) regimes in Niamey. The historical political marginalization of Zinder is vividly remembered in present-day narratives and has contributed to what some refer to as a “rebellious *Zindérois* identity” (Danda 2004). According to narratives of historical political marginalization that I noted in numerous informal conversations, whereas France had claimed the decision to move the capital to Niamey was due to ground-water shortages in Zinder, the actual reason was a French fear of resistance from the “rebellious *Zindérois*”. This narrative is taken as proof that the French always favored Zarma ethnicity and western Nigeriens over Hausa ethnicity and eastern origin. When the capital was transferred, Niamey was said to be a small village, whereas Zinder was

⁶⁷ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 7 December 2011, translated from French.

⁶⁸ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 7 December 2011, translated from French.

⁶⁹ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 7 December 2011, translated from French.

⁷⁰ SWT is an abbreviation of *Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala*. A glorification of Allah which roughly translates into “the most glorified, the most high”.

⁷¹ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 7 December 2011, translated from French.



Figure 4.2: Destroyed traffic lights and burning tires at a major junction in Zinder. Photo: Jannik Schritt.

a highly organized, hierarchical large town with a proud sultanate. In demarcation to its neighbors, these narratives not only produce a Hausa ethnic entity out of a heterogeneous and fragmented social reality (Nicolas 1975), but they also construct a dichotomy between an ancient and proud “Zinder/Hausa civilization” on the one hand, and an “uncivilized” Niamey/Zarma ethnicity on the other.

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

That evening the regional and municipal council, the Comité de Gestion Scolaire (COGES), the Conseil des Sages, the Syndicat National des Enseignants du Niger (SNEN) teachers’ union, and the Association Nationale des Parents d’Élèves (ANPE) parents’ association held an emergency meeting at the city hall. Afterwards, they released a joint press statement noting that two people had been killed in the



Figure 4.3: Burned-down police station at the main market. Photo: Jannik Schritt.

protests, four had been seriously injured, and twenty-one more people taken for emergency medical treatment. They condemned the police violence, saying it was an elementary violation of order which deprived students the right of personal freedom and protest, and an attempt to humiliate peaceful citizens. As the representative of the incumbent regime in Zinder, they held the governor responsible for events and demanded not only an independent investigation into the violence, but also his immediate resignation.

Similarly, CRAS members as well as student representatives held the governor responsible for the violence and demanded his immediate resignation. Like USN representatives, CRAS president Sadat compared the protests to those of 9 February 1990 which had paved the way for the transition to democracy. Blaming the political authorities, Sadat underlined that the *Zindérois* were ready to die for justice. The USN said the police violence was a barbaric and unprofessional act and demanded that justice be done. Clearly affected by the events, private radio shows were charged with emotion that evening, with announcers and callers yelling and shrieking. This intensity was matched in words, with some even accusing the governor of having personally killed the two victims. Although some USN members wanted to continue the demonstrations, in light of the tragic events, the union decided not to demonstrate the following day, instead suspending school for three days.

The governor Elhadji Oumarou Seydou Issaka also made a press statement. Also affected by the violence, he shrieked that he had not given the order to shoot, and that the policeman who had fired the deadly shots had been arrested. Claiming that

the cause of the violent riots was an affair between the youth and the police and was therefore not related to the (regional) government, he said investigations had already begun in Niamey. That same evening, former civil society leader and then Minister of Justice Marou Amadou made a press statement in Niamey about the protests. He called on the population and the authorities in Zinder to restore calm and order, and to respect the rules of democracy. After expressing his sympathy for the families of the victims, he said that those responsible would be held accountable, that the police chief had already been stood down, and that the two police officers accused of the shootings had been arrested.

However, that same evening, more messages were sent to coordinate riots planned for the following day. In these short messages, places in Zinder were renamed after places made famous by the Arab Spring (Tahrir Square) and other events such as the genocide in Rwanda (Hôtel de Mille Collines).⁷²

Rendezvous at Tahrir Square tomorrow in the center of the city of Mille Collines DAMAGARAM. Combatants from all sides. Merchants be careful.⁷³

A big march will take place in all regions on Thursday 8 December. Teachers, students and parents of pupils mobilize to rescue your school. Pass the message on to all students.⁷⁴

A massive violent march has been organized for the whole Zindérois crowd (pupils, students, teachers, motor-taxi drivers, merchants, salesmen, workers...) to reclaim justice for the death of two pupils targeted and killed by tear gas canisters, to reclaim justice for an innocent girl killed by a bullet from the barbaric, criminal and murderous police. Dear brothers and sisters, come to assist this big march tomorrow at 9 am. Meeting point roundabout Total. Pass the info to the whole Zindérois population to allow them mobilizing and arming themselves (arrows, sling shots...). Please circulate the message.⁷⁵

4.6 Palais Riots

Having placed tires and fuel at strategically important places like junctions and cross-roads in the city center during the night, youth gangs (*palais*) spearheaded the protests on the morning of December 8. Given the events of the previous days, the police were

⁷² Literally thousands of large pieces of rock are spread throughout Zinder city.

⁷³ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 7 December 2011, translated from French.

⁷⁴ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 7 December 2011, translated from French.

⁷⁵ SMS received on my mobile phone during fieldwork in Zinder on 7 December 2011, translated from French.



Figure 4.4: Burned-down ECOBANK at the Total roundabout in Zinder. Taken on the afternoon of December 8, after the military had been deployed to secure the city. Photo: Jannik Schritt.

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

Some of my friends and informants suspected that the national government's political opponents – especially Mahamane Ousmane's CDS-Rahama and Dan Dubai's MPPAD – were behind the riots, having reputedly hired well-known criminals and *palais* leaders to create havoc. According to this theory, the goal was to incite a new military coup that would again bring regime change since military coups in Niger are one of the few opportunities for a change of power, as no incumbent party has ever lost an election. While the political opposition indeed funded and organized these protests to some extent, this mobilization alone cannot explain their emergence.

As my description of the protests made clear, by experiencing police violence and the death of uninvolved bystanders, smaller and disconnected protests culminated in larger urban riots, as heterogeneous elements were affected into mass action in a concatenation of time- and place-specific events. We saw how political opponents, civil society activists, school pupils, students and *kabou kabou* all attended the trial of Dan Dubai which coincided not only with the trial of a school pupil, but also with the governor passing by. Only after the crowd had attacked the governor, and the subsequent arrival of more police to disperse them, was a school pupil killed. The killing led to more student protests, which then caused the death of a passing woman. After the violence of December 7, the police were ordered to avoid confrontation, allowing youth gangs to riot in the streets uncontested, and to loot a bank. In this sense, there was no single factor that caused the riots in Zinder, but rather the culmination of mobilization, affect and coincidence.

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

4.7 Redressive Politics and the Restoration of Peace

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

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

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

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

Several key actors had not been included in the meeting and had thus missed out on payments. These included members of CRAS and of the *palais*, who both continued to push for further protests. Having neither been granted an audience with the president at the refinery’s inauguration, nor been appointed to the regional government committee, nor invited to the meeting, CRAS members were extremely disappointed. In the days following the pacification of Zinder, a CRAS member approached me to ask for help to find an international donor, as they felt the need to make the committee a more significant civil society player.

I agreed to help in the search for an international donor and started to write emails to political and social foundations in Germany, one of which then requested that CRAS submit a proposal specifying the planned activities and the money required for so-called start-up funding. In early January, I called the member to discuss the possibility for funding. We made an appointment to talk prior to a regular meeting on 3 January 2012. When I arrived, several other members were already present. He then told me he did not want me to talk then, as he said that the other members were not to be trusted. After the meeting, we met together with one of his closest colleagues in CRAS, who was also from the same sub-organization. Here, they repeated the claim that there were “spies” within CRAS, as it was rumored that the governor was always up to date on the organization’s activities, a problem they did not have within their own organization. Therefore, they suggested we meet at a bar later. Here, I insisted that we make the plan transparent within CRAS, to which they finally agreed. At the next meeting, two days later, I presented the aims and the funding possibilities of the donor institution. I insisted on a transparent course of action in the form of a collective vision of CRAS before a written proposal could be submitted.

The next day, one of the two members I had met beforehand privately called to meet me so that we could write the proposal together. When I arrived, only the two CRAS members were present, as was a man who I had never met before, the president of an NGO whose organization I had never heard of. The meeting was about how to write the proposal and what CRAS wanted to ask for. With his experience writing funding proposals, the NGO president was there to help guide the process. I was there to once again outline the donor's funding guidelines, especially in the form of so-called start-up funding. The discussion soon centered on what CRAS wanted and needed to organize. Their demands centered almost exclusively on materials, including two motorbikes, as well as office equipment (desks, office chairs, computers, laptops, printers, cameras, and electricity converters), tables and chairs, an internet connection, and rent, as well as, on my suggestion, funding for publicity, especially radio debates. In total, they applied for 4,560,000 XOF (6,952 Euro) in funding. It soon became apparent that the whole application process was neither about a common vision for CRAS, nor a knowledge transfer among its members, but rather the appropriation of the funding opportunity by a small inner group. I nevertheless decided to translate their original proposal into German and submitted it. The proposal was rejected some weeks later.

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

The *palais* leaders were the second important group which was not invited by the sultan to meet the prime minister and did not feel represented by the USN. Not only were youth excluded from representation at the meeting, they were (and are) also effectively locked out of public opinion making on radio, as they lack formal political recognition and the financial means to buy radio programs. As such, youth voices on radio are limited to talk-back shows. In the first emission of *planète reggae* after the riots, youth callers blamed the unrest on the political authorities and their bad gov-

ernance. Others called for violence and even threatened the political authorities, saying that they would “make *Boko Haram*”, a call with important connotations. As I have already shown, youth violence has become an increasingly important public political concern. This violence is fueled not only by cooptation through wealthier, more powerful actors, but also by Nigerien youth’s increasing dissatisfaction with both the political establishment (Olivier de Sardan 2017), and also with their own position and role in society (Souley 2012; Honwana 2013). In response to the dissatisfaction and threats of violence expressed on *planète reggae*, a wealthy Zinder businessman (who was part of the governmental clientelist network) attempted to coopt the moderator. To do this, he approached a CRAS member (a close friend of the moderator) asking him to pass on the message to stop broadcasting youth statements. The member of the committee said he took the money (20,000 XOF, about 30 Euro), but did not pass on the message to the moderator, because he too was a youth leader who felt that youth deserved a voice. Thus, *planète reggae* continued to broadcast.

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

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

Having been at the forefront of the riots, Zinder youth gained political leverage and became addressees of government policies. On the initiative of local political

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

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

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to provide a fresh, empirical look at the micro-level workings of politics in oil-age Niger, and in doing so, it reveals important aspects in the emergence of an African oil state, aspects often overlooked by proponents of the resource curse thesis. As in the case of big politics and power struggles at the national level, this micro-political case study demonstrates that the coming of oil does not simply determine the constellations of power and the outcomes of political confrontations on a local

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

5 Disputing Oil

The coming of oil in Niger coincided with decentralization efforts to reform the country's regional patterns of rule. During and following the colonial regime, the country's rulers implemented different means to decentralize power. In 1964, the government created departments (*départements*) according to ethno-linguistic criteria.⁷⁶ The department of Agadez was designated for a Tuareg majority, Diffa for a Kanuri majority, and Tillabéri (that surrounds the capital Niamey) and Dosso for the Zarma-Songhai. Meanwhile Nigerien Hausaland was split into three administrative zones with approximately equal populations: Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder. In the 1970s the different parts of Niger were connected by the construction of the main Nigerien national road, the *Route Nationale 1* or the *route de l'unité* (unity highway). The route reaches from the country's south-west along the Sahel belt to the east, symbolizing "in a very physical way, the hyphen which is supposed to produce the Nigerien nation-state" (A. Idrissa 2009:185). By 1980, the second Nigerien national road had been completed. Running from Niamey to Arlit in the far north, the *Route Nationale 2* is often referred to as the "*l'autoroute de l'uranium*" (uranium highway). In 1998, the *département* (department) was abolished as administrative pillar to make way for the *région* (region). The *arrondissements* (districts) were transformed into *départements* (departments), and

⁷⁶ Loi n°64-023 du 17 juillet 1964: création de 7 départements et 32 arrondissements, et 120 à 150 communes. <https://www.decentralisation-niger.org/index.php/decentralisation/processus>.

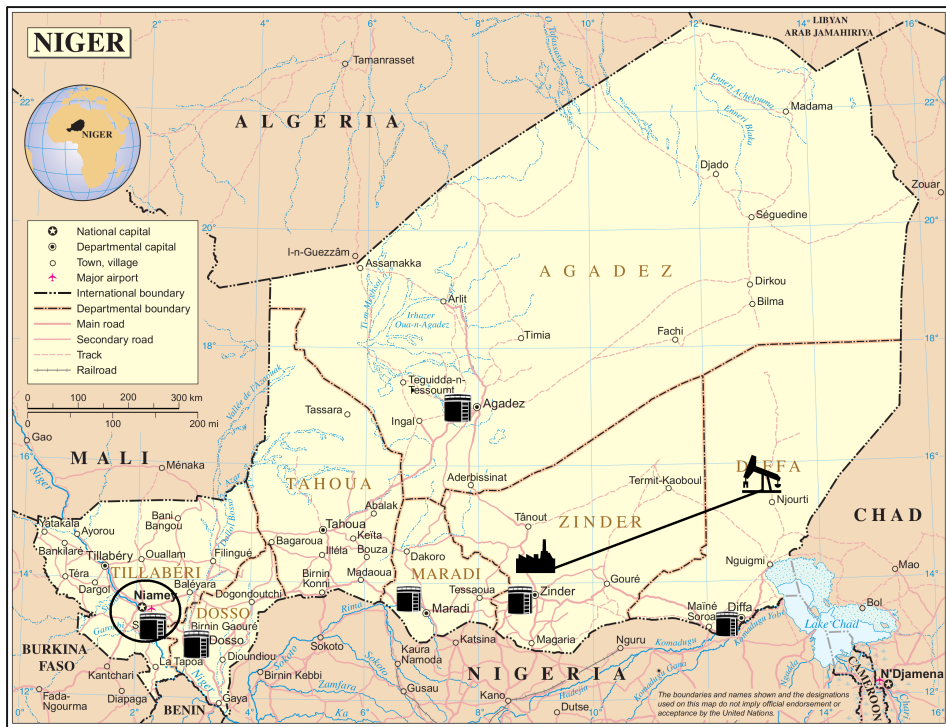


Figure 5.1: The oil infrastructure in Niger showing the wells, the refinery, the center of consumption (circle) and the six fuel depots in Diffa, Zinder, Maradi, Dosso, Niamey and Agadez. Source: own illustration based on United Nations map.

the *chefs-lieux des arrondissements* became *communes urbaines* (urban municipalities), while the *postes administratifs* (administrative posts) were transformed into *communes rurales* (rural municipalities).

However, it was not until the Fifth Republic under Tandja that decentralization began in earnest. The *Schéma 2000 de Décentralisation* envisioned the creation of 265 *communes*, as well as 213 rural and fifty-two urban municipalities. For the first time, municipal elections were held in 2004 (for more on decentralization politics in Niger see Olivier de Sardan and Tidjani Alou 2009). Following the 2010 coup and the creation of a new constitution, Djibo once again restructured Niger's administrative landscape, creating the *conseil régional* (regional council).⁷⁷ At the rural and most local level, the state translates into the *groupement* for nomadic and the *canton* for sedentary groups. Each of these units is led by administrative leaders or *chef traditionnels* –

⁷⁷ Ordonnance n°2010-54, du 17 septembre 2010, portant Code Général des Collectivités Territoriales de la République du Niger. <https://www.interieur.gouv.ne/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Ordonnance-2010-Code-general-collectivites-territoriales.pdf>.

the *chef de groupement* and the *chef de canton*, respectively. These higher-level leaders command lower-level leaders, the *chef de tribu* for nomadic groups, and the *chef de village* for sedentary groups. The political power of these leaders rests on ascribed state authority (such as the right to collect taxes) on the one hand, and on the generally accepted, although somewhat weak legitimacy of aristocratic inheritance on the other.

As the following map shows, the infrastructure of oil in Niger is constructed across different administrative regions. Whereas the oil is extracted in Niger's eastern most region Diffa, it is refined more than 400 km to the west in the region of Zinder, which is itself 1000 km east of the country's metropolis Niamey, where around 80 percent of inland consumption takes place, and which is also the center of political administration (see figure 5.1).

In this chapter, I extend out from the political dynamics in Zinder, the site of the oil refinery (see the two previous chapters), to the administrative regions of Diffa, the site of oil extraction, and to Niamey (and its surrounding regions Tillabéri and Dosso), the site of the national administration and majority of fuel consumption. In doing so, I examine the transformation processes spurred on by the materialization of the oil infrastructure (the oil wells, the refinery and the fuel depots) across these regions. I will show how the dispersion of the infrastructure over different administrative regions triggered processes of territorial and symbolic reconfigurations. It is through these processes that political, regional and ethnic differences became newly articulated (for a similar argument with regard to Nigeria see Nwajaku 2005). Such processes also show how natural resource ownership, oil extraction practices, state control over oil resources and symbolic claims to "our oil" have created different understandings of "oil citizenship" (Adunbi 2015).

5.1 Diffa's Oil Autochthony

Located on Niger's eastern border, the Diffa region is numerically dominated by the Kanuri ethnic group.⁷⁸ In the region, labor has traditionally long been divided along ethnic lines (Bovin 1985), a division which broadly continues today: the majority Kanuri dominate southern Diffa and are mostly farmers; the Fulani are typically agropastoralists with herds of sheep, goats and donkeys; the Fulani subgroup of Wodaabe are highly specialized transhumant Zebu cattle pastoralists (Schareika 2003a, 2003b) who arrived in the Lake Chad area around 1910 (Schareika 2004); the Tubu, who have a caste-like internal hierarchy of noblemen (*daza*), captives (*azza*), and blacksmiths and artisans (*aggra*) are mostly camel-rearing specialists (Baroin 1985); as are the Diffa Arabs, who also engage in the long-distance camel trade; the Hausa are mostly market

⁷⁸ The ethnic makeup of Diffa is as follows: 60.2 percent Kanuri, 24.6 percent Fulani, 6.2 percent Tubu, 4.5 percent Hausa, 2.4 percent Arab, 0.9 percent Zarma-Songhai, 1 percent Tuareg, and 0.2 percent other (INS-Niger 2011).

brokers and often work as butchers and tanners, occupations Kanuri generally refuse as impure; and the Zarma-Songhai typically work in the administration and the army (Bovin 1985:57–58). Although the ethnic division of labor is not always clear-cut and changing, it has (co)produced a region which is built along strong ethnic identities rather than a collective regional identity.

Unlike in Zinder, prior to oil exploitation, there had been little or even no narrative or expression of a collective *Diffalais* identity. Instead, residents of N’gourti often complained that their political representatives in Niamey lacked regionalism and pursued only their own political ambitions and their families’ interests (H. Moussa 2009:292). To understand why a collective *Diffalais* identity had not emerged, despite a long history of settlement in the area, we need to trace the history of rule and domination in this area. Slices of today’s administrative region of Diffa were first part of the Kanem-Bornu Empire that emerged in the ninth century, which in its most powerful period (the beginning of the 13th century) stretched over large parts of today’s Chad, southern Libya (Fezzan), eastern Niger, northeastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon. Founded by nomadic Tubu around 300 AD, the Kanem Empire was conquered around 1380 by the Bornu Empire, which was ruled by aristocratic clans of Kanuri. The Kanem-Bornu Empire shared several characteristics with the Damagaram sultanate in terms of organization. Islam was slowly introduced in the 11th century, articulating with the pre-existing hierarchical structures and forming the ideological superstructure. Nevertheless, over the next nine centuries, the state would remain split into ethnically distinct sectors (Bovin 1985:55). The power of the Bornu Empire was based on long distance trans-Saharan trade, especially of slaves, which composed the core of the army. With warriors of Fulani Jihad conquering parts of Bornu, the Empire had already been in decline from the early 19th century, and was finally conquered by Rabeh, who invaded it from eastern Sudan in 1893. Seven years later, Rabeh himself was defeated by colonial forces. Whereas the most northern areas became part of French West Africa and later postcolonial Niger, the largest part of the state was colonized by the British and became known as Nigeria. Within Nigeria, a remnant of the old empire – the Bornu Emirate – maintains a ceremonial rule. Thus, in contrast to the sultanate of Damagaram, the center of the ancient Bornu Empire does not lie in Niger, but in northeastern Nigeria, where the Kanuri have their political center today. Consequently, despite the historical legacy of the Kanem-Bornu Empire, a collective *Diffalais* identity never emerged, with identities remaining most strongly bound to ethnic and subethnic belonging. However, oil production has changed this, at least to some extent.

Prior to oil production, large sections of the “unity highway”, especially in the east, had been left to deteriorate. In the east, the state was said to be quasi-absent at the administrative level in N’gourti (spelt Njourti on the map), the lowest level of direct state administration at that time, and the locality closest to the Agadem oil wells (H. Moussa 2009). Before oil production, the N’gourti administration was chronically underfunded, had limited financial autonomy, lacked infrastructure, and political representatives were disconnected from the population. Moreover, due to its strategic

geography as an international border region and a region of former conflicts and rebellions, N'gourti was dominated by military and security personal (H. Moussa 2009). Hadiza Moussa (2013:5) notes that the transformation of the old administrative post of N'gourti into a *commune* under the decentralization program was justified entirely by oil production, which was envisioned as a means to finance local development and solve the areas problems.

The two administrative units most affected by oil production are the Tubu *groupe-ment* Tarduga in Atrouna and a *groupement* of *Awlâd Suleyman* Arabs in Melec. Atrouna and Melec are water wells located several kilometers south of the CNPC's main base *Djaouro*.⁷⁹ *Djaouro* itself is 67 km north of the administrative post of N'gourti, and about 200 km north of Diffa city, the regional capital and the site where most of the oil worker recruitment offices are located. Both the Tubu and the Arab *groupements* are said to have close relations to the Nigerien state. The Tarduga of Atrouna have historically been loyal to the state in exchange for territorial negotiations in their favor (Musch 2013). From the 1920s onward, in exchange for good relations with the French, the Tarduga received the administrative chieftaincy and French military support against rival groups, while their loyalty to recent governments has seen them hold the administrative status of a *groupement*, thereby maintaining a level of political and economic power (Musch 2013).

Often economically significantly stronger than the Tubu, Arab pastoralists in Diffa are eyed suspiciously by other ethnic groups, especially as many are relative late-comers to the region. Aside from the *Shuwa* Arabs who started arriving in Kanem-Borno in the eighth century (Braukämper 2004), the first small group of *Awlâd Suleyman* Arabs came from the Fezzan (today Libya and Chad) to the Diffa region in the mid-19th century (Zeltner 1980; Braukämper 2004). A second, much larger migration of *Mohamid* Arabs took place following the 1974 Sahelian drought, the Chadian civil war (1965–79), and the Chadian-Libyan conflict in the 1980s. While there were around 4000 nomadic Arabs in eastern Niger in the 1970s (Decalo 1989:30), today there are around 150,000. Most are involved in the international camel trade and are respected by the state as good taxpayers in their districts (Idrissa and Decalo 2012:64). Thus, although latecomers, many members of the Arab community have been issued national identity cards by local authorities and have acquired land rights which their ethnic neighbors typically attribute to their financial power, political connections and corruption. Indeed, the Arab community is said to have had a profound political influence in the Issoufou government, especially through then PNDS-President and

⁷⁹ Formerly known as *Tantammerdé*, the CNPC changed the name of the site to *Djaouro* (Attahirou 2012:43). Oil companies often change the names of oil zones to avoid land claims from neighboring communities (Magrin and Maoundonodji 2012). In this instance, however, I also heard accusations of ethnic appropriation in the name change. According to this version, the area was first inhabited by Fulani, who drilled the pastoral water well, and who accused Tubu and Arab groups of changing the name to claim their autochthony over the region. Based on the etymology of the words, however, it is difficult to verify these claims.

former foreign minister Mohamed Bazoum, who comes from the Arab minority in the area.⁸⁰

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

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

Reflecting on the problems created by oil extraction in Diffa (particularly the Manga area in the Agadem oil block), the Tubu Collectif des Cadres et Représentants des Organisations de la Société Civile du Manga (OSC Manga) wrote the following in May 2011:⁸¹

It is important to note that the start of oil explorations has generated real hope among the population, who see it as the solution to the pervasive poverty and underdevelopment plaguing Niger in general, and the area of Manga in partic-

⁸⁰ In the 2020/2021 presidential election, a controversy about Mohamed Bazoum’s birth certificate emerged. Opponents claimed that he is not of Nigerien origin but only migrated to Niger at the age of seven which would have banned him from running for presidency. The political opposition heavily exploited this “ethnic card” in the elections. Nevertheless, he was elected as new President of Niger following Issoufou in 2021.

⁸¹ The eight-page pamphlet was leaked to the media, with an abridged version published on 6 June 2011 in the private newspaper *Le Temps* under the initials M.I.

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

In the pamphlet, the OSC Manga portrayed the population of Diffa, especially the indigenous population of Manga⁸², as the actual bearers of the negative effects of oil. First, expressions of hope often referred to oil developments in al-Qaddhāfī's Libya, which many herders migrated to on a regular basis. Based on these experiences, they expected oil-age Niger to follow the example of the Libyan "distributive oil state" (Vandewalle 1998) and not of conflict-ridden Nigeria (Attahirou 2012:49). In a long list of bullet points, the authors then cited oil's negative effects. Amongst others, they noted the following impacts: chemical waste deposits, land degradation, water, vibration and noise pollution, the loss of livestock, wildlife, and grazing land, and even the death of two young herders who drank chemicals left behind by oil workers. After naming oil's negative effects, they blamed former President Tandja, whom the OSC Manga committee met in 2009, for turning a deaf ear to their concerns, and having personalized the oil affair. Then they made recourse to President Issoufou's message to the nation (see chapter 2), in which he stressed the need for oil production to take place in a setting of national peace and security. They argued that measures were needed to sensitize and help youth, and that the whole population must profit from the oil. If not, "chauvinism", "xenophobia" and "egoism" would develop further, which in turn would threaten the unity, stability and social peace of the nation (OSC Manga 2011).

To emphasize the urgency in addressing their rights, aims and claims, like the municipal and regional councilors' narrative about unemployed youth gangs in Zinder, OSC Manga argued that a social explosion was imminent. They intensified the threat by referring to then current instability in Libya and the former Tubu rebellion in Diffa. Starting in 1993, the rebellion leaders, the FARS (Forces Armées Révolutionnaires du Sahara) had demanded that the Nigerien state finance development in the

⁸² Manga normally denotes a southern area of Diffa which borders Nigeria and is dominated by Kanuri. However, the authors of the pamphlet, themselves all of Tubu origin, seem to relate Manga to the oil extracting region around N'gourti.

Kaouar⁸³ and Manga provinces. Allied with the Tuareg rebels against the state of Niger, the joint rebellion ended with the Algiers peace agreement in 1997. However, the threat from FARS never really disappeared. Indeed, just after the signing of the oil contract between CNPC and Niger in 2008, FARS released a statement in which they “warn[ed] the Chinese company against all exploration during this period of insecurity in the Agadem block” (Energy Daily 2008).⁸⁴ FARS said that it is “absurd to refine oil, extracted in the east, in a plant in the south”, insisting that the oil refinery in Zinder would deprive Diffa of its resources. Finally, FARS also said it had planted landmines in the south-eastern zone of Kaouar to hamper the work of foreign companies, and that it would hold “the government of Niger and the Chinese society responsible for any failure to heed this warning” (Energy Daily 2008). Claiming that they lack the powerful political representatives that the Arab groups have, OSC Manga thus adopts a different approach to make their demands heard at state level: they refer to but rephrase the historical threat of FARS’ violence and rebellion in the region.

In the OSC Manga narrative, disaffected and desperate young men who had had military training and had worked in Libya were now being forced to return to Niger (and especially Diffa) with the fall of the al-Qaddhāfī regime. These young men – about 200,000 across Niger – now found themselves jobless, not only lacking the means to support their families, but even living on their families’ little resources. According to local narratives, in this situation, the non-recruitment of oil workers from the resident population created conflicts (Attahirou 2012:49–57). With the arms used in the Tubu rebellion in the 1990s reportedly still in circulation, OSC Manga argued that these men could easily join subversive movements if the hope and expectations related to oil production were not fulfilled.

Near the end of 2011, rumors began to spread that the petroleum code determining the redistribution of 15 percent of oil revenue would be amended, so that Zinder would also profit as the site of the refinery. With rumors starting that the amendment would mean sharing revenues between Diffa and Zinder,⁸⁵ a group of youth in Diffa city feared that this would mean a loss of revenue and issued a declaration on 26 December 2011. In the declaration, they: rejected the proposition of the Council of Ministers to modify the petroleum code to divide the 15 percent of oil revenue between Zinder and Diffa, calling it a provocation for the *Diffalais*; claimed such a change threatened social peace, and called on the governor to maintain order; called on the members of parliament to vote against such an unjust law, demanded deputies from Diffa region hand in their resignations, and that the Diffa population fight a law change; and finally, called on the *Zindérois* not to turn against the interests of the Diffa region. In response, local politicians in Diffa also issued a declaration against any

⁸³ Kaouar is located north of Manga. About 150 km long, this north-south escarpment cuts through the Ténéré desert along the dunes of the Erg of Bilma.

⁸⁴ The blog has now ceased to exist (<https://web.archive.org/web/20231202233959/https://m-n-j.blogspot.com/2008/04/communiqu-des-forces-armes.html>).

⁸⁵ Some rumors even had it that the 15 percent would be split according to the population size, which would have further benefited the Zinder region.

changes to the law and threatened to withdraw their regional representatives (deputies) from the National Assembly.

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

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

Through such narratives, Hadiza Moussa (2013) concluded, the decision to build the refinery in Zinder had united the different ethnic groups in Diffa under a collective *Diffalais* identity which defined itself in opposition to the *Zindérois* and western Nigeriens. We can see how the entanglement of the oil infrastructure with different administrative regions and the revenue law gave rise to a narrative of a unified *Diffalais* identity. Similarly, Attahirou (2013:46) argues, that the beginning of oil production led to the emergence of a more powerful regional identity, which in its presence sidelined existing intra- and interethnic conflicts, and united different ethnic groups in Diffa in their grievances and in the quest for the oil rent against other regions, namely Zinder and Niamey (Tillabéri and Dosso). In this sense, greed and grievances do not simply spur conflicts as the resource curse thesis predicts but can also lead to cohesion.

In short, a new *Diffalais* collective identity emerged due to the entanglement of the presence as well as absence of certain infrastructures of oil with particular administrative spaces, revenue laws, oil’s material effects and histories of rebellion. The

construction of the oil refinery in Zinder rather than in Diffa, and the claim that Diffa suffered from oil's negative effects while the positive effects materialized only in Zinder, promoted the emergence of an "oil autochthony" in Diffa. As in various world contexts, the subsoil resources became part of broader struggles around citizenship and governance, interrogating the place of indigenous communities in a postcolonial nation-state that is imbued with colonial memories (Sawyer 2004; Perreault and Valdivia 2010; Anthias 2017, 2018). The negative effects of oil were thus connected to narratives of marginalization and histories of rebellion in the region, while the administrative space of Diffa as a region also became pertinent in public consciousness due to the law to retrocede 15 percent of the revenue from oil production to the region. In doing so, with the dispersion of the petro-infrastructure, a new collective *Diffalais* identity was thus coproduced alongside the reproduction of the *Zindérois* identity (see the previous chapters).

5.2 Niamey's Oil Nationalism

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

The Nigerien government bore the brunt of public blame for the new fuel price. In public discourse, the Chinese were simply doing business, while it was the Issoufou

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

In May 2012, the executive office of the oil transport union, the Syndicat des Transporteurs d'Hydrocarbures du Niger (SNTHN) accused the state-owned Société Nigérienne des Produits Pétroliers (SONIDEP), which was in charge of stocking, distributing and marketing oil products, of "mafia-like practices". SNTHN accused SONIDEP of informally selling delivery notes and of distributing delivery notes to businesses which were loyal to and had financed Issoufou's election campaign. Through the anticorruption authority, the Haute Autorité de Lutte contre la Corruption et les Infractions Assimilées (HALCIA), the transport union pressed charges against the General Director of SONIDEP.⁸⁶

With increased competition and less work than estimated, the transport industry was growing increasingly concerned about their futures. From 1963 until market liberalization in the early 1990s, the state-owned Société Nationale des Transports Nigériens (SNTN) had had the monopoly of the transport business. With liberalization, the size and number of tanker trucks increased markedly, from about 300 in the early 1990s to about 1050 in 2012, while the average truck size also increased from around 35,000 liters to around 50,000 liters. Today, some tankers can carry up to 70,000 liters. Prior to the beginning of oil exploitation in Niger, fuel had been imported to Niamey from Venezuela via the harbors of Lomé in Togo and Cotonou in Benin. For a trip from the port of Lomé in Togo to Niamey, transport companies were paid 52 XOF (0.08 Euro)/liter, and 46 XOF (0.07 Euro)/liter from Cotonou to Niamey. With the construction of the refinery in Zinder, however, the distances became far shorter, with fuel only having to be transported from the refinery to the six depots inside the country: Sorey/Niamey, Dosso, Maradi, Zinder, Agadez, and Diffa (see figure 5.1 at the beginning of this chapter). With these shorter distances, transport firms also re-

⁸⁶ However, the HALCIA neither have the powers of a judicial police officer, nor of an investigating judge or a prosecutor.

ceived less per round-trip. For companies then, the most attractive route was that from Zinder to Niamey, which was the longest and paid 45 XOF (0.069 Euro)/liter. To cover their costs, transport unionists claimed in interviews that lorry drivers needed to make at least two trips per month, with most drivers however getting less than one a month and breaks of sometimes up to three months. Although the truckers were paid a monthly salary by the transport companies, they feared losing their jobs or being forced to become temporary workers, if the low demand persisted. With the transport industry excited about the future of oil production, companies had purchased more, larger tankers. This, in turn, had led to an over-supply and, according to those in the industry, had left them ultimately worse off than before. Finally, with so many tankers going backwards and forth, the already poor roads were deteriorating, which in turn damaged the tankers themselves.

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

The transport unions strike had widespread popular urban support, as well as from a significant section of civil society. This reflects the national character of the oil debate in Niamey. Only five days after the strike commenced, the entire fuel supply had been cut, petrol stations were forced to close, and the price rose to over 1000 XOF/liter (1.52 Euro) on the black market. This happened despite a law that SONIDEP must hold enough fuel to supply the area for at least 50 days, and rumors quickly circulated that SONIDEP had sold its security stocks to neighboring countries. In any case, two important reasons for the lack of security stocks were underproduction at SORAZ, which in 2012 was not yet operating at full capacity (producing 11,000 of its 20,000 bpd capacity), and a halt in production to clean the oil installations. Rumors circulated that the CNPC had stopped production to pressure the Nigerien government

into closing SONIDEP, so that SORAZ could take control of marketing the fuel. Whatever the reasons for the lack of oil reserves, in striking, the unions could effectively bring the region to a halt and hit government revenue hard by stopping the distribution of oil from the state-owned SONIDEP.

Due to the transport unions sabotage potential, being able to interrupting virtually all urban economic activity, they forced the government to negotiate. On the tenth day of the strike, an agreement was reached. The agreement included a daily limit on the number of foreign tankers to be loaded at the various fuel depots of Niger: five a day at the Zinder depot, five at Dosso, and twenty at Sorey. However, as the Sorey depot of SONIDEP in Niamey was a relatively small depot and therefore could not provide a sufficient supply to the foreign market, foreign transport companies with special government authorization were still allowed to pick up fuel from SORAZ in Zinder. The agreement also included a review around three months later, on 20 November 2012, and government repair and maintenance of the poor roads.

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

The widespread public and media rejection of the strikes was based on two main factors. First, one year prior, taxi drivers had received a so-called *ticket modérateur*, a state subsidy providing them about 35,000 XOF⁸⁷ (53.36 Euro) per month until the beginning of oil production in January 2012, a subsidy which was costing the government about 180 million XOF a month (274,408 Euro). Despite rising fuel prices in the buildup to oil production, the subsidy had ensured that the taxi fare remained at 200 XOF.⁸⁸ But with *ticket modérateur* ending in July 2012, taxi unions started demanding a lower fuel price, before ultimately raising the fare to 300 XOF in October 2012. The unions argued that whereas the cost of living and the on-road costs for taxis (purchasing price, transit, customs, registration) had increased significantly, fares had

⁸⁷ The *ticket modérateur* was a per driver subsidy of somewhere between 30,000 and 45,000 XOF/month, depending on the newspaper sources and who you ask.

⁸⁸ Most taxis do not belong to the drivers but to businessmen or state officials, who lend them out for around 8,000 XOF per day (12.20 Euro). Drivers typically start work around 6 am, fueling their taxis on credit. Having repaid their credit in the course of the day, they typically continue to work before sub-lending to a second driver until around midnight. Thus, the fuel price has a major impact on the drivers' income.

remained unchanged for several years. However, with the fixed fuel price dropping, and having benefited from the *ticket modérateur* for a year, the taxi fare increase was widely seen as opportunist, with many negative comments about the unionists to be found in newspaper articles or informal conversations.

In these comments, the taxi labor unions were also suffering a lack of credibility among the population because one part had been coopted by the Tandja regime and another by the Issoufou regime. After the existing taxi unions had embezzled the first payments of the *ticket modérateur*, SYNCOTAXI was created on 30 June 2011. However, the new union was not created by a taxi driver or drivers, but rather by experienced civil society activist Mahamadou Gamatié. Gamatié had started his civil society career during the “movement against the high costs of living” in 2005, fighting alongside Nouhou Arzkiá’s Mouvement Patriotique, who would later become one of the main supporters of *Tazartché*. Gamatié denounced the unionists for embezzling the money (several of whom were consequently arrested) and lobbied for a payout from the national treasury. In doing so, SYNCOTAXI became the dominant taxi labor union, claiming to represent 4,000 of the apparently 5,200 taxis in Niamey. Alongside Arzika’s Mouvement Patriotique, renamed Mouvement pour la Promotion de la Citoyenneté Responsable (MPCR)⁸⁹ in 2011, and the political opposition ARN (mainly composed of CDS and MNSD politicians), SYNCOTAXI had been vocal in its criticism of the fixed fuel price since the official announcement in November 2011. These political opponents also referred to Tandja and his promise of a lower fuel price. SYNCOTAXI and CPT responded to smaller taxi unions refusal to join the strikes, and their calls to drivers to boycott it, by accusing them of being on the government payroll. However, Gamatié’s profile as a civil society activist with a pro-*Tazartché* history, and not a taxi driver, undermined his public credibility. Indeed, his propagation of similar views and work together with the political opposition led to accusations that SYNCOTAXI was in fact an association of *Tazartchists* that was only playing the political game against the Issoufou regime.

Treating SYNCOTAXI like the political opposition by refusing to negotiate with them and rejecting their demands to deregulate the Niamey transport market, the government continued fixing the taxi price at 200 XOF. To break the strike, they also temporarily introduced public buses in Niamey with fares of 100 XOF, and arrested taxi drivers who continued to charge 300 XOF/trip. The public could then report drivers for overcharging.⁹⁰ According to SYNCOTAXI, about sixty drivers were subsequently arrested and their cars confiscated. To retrieve the cars, drivers would have to pay police between 15,000 and 57,000 XOF (22.87–86.90 Euro), depending on their personal networks. At the same time, *kabou kabou* (motorcycle taxis) became common in the city to meet the demand. Although *kabou kabou* were officially forbidden in Niamey, SYNCOTAXI claimed that the government was tolerating them to break

⁸⁹ To restore credibility lost due to political affiliations or cooptation, leaders may decide to rename civil society associations, especially to appeal to foreign donors.

⁹⁰ Each taxi is marked with a number on the back to make it easy to identify.

the strike. While SYNCOTAXI persisted in demanding 300 XOF for fares for several weeks, drivers soon returned to charging 200 XOF, complaining that the government was authoritarian, and that they needed to work to support their families.

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

Despite the lack of success on this occasion, taxi union strikes would pop up time and again over the next few years. In January 2013, the government reduced the fixed fuel price from 579 XOF to 540 XOF/liter. Twelve months later, the taxi unions again went on strike, demanding another reduction. In response, the government promised to review the fuel price in 2016, when the pipeline to Chad for the export of crude was expected to be completed. When 2016 came around, however, the pipeline was not even under construction yet, and the government refused to reduce the price. In January and in November 2016, taxi unions again went on strike in response to the government refusal. The Nigerien transport ministry finally agreed to negotiations with SYNCOTAXI, and the two signed an agreement on 24 November 2016 to end the strikes in return for reduced taxes and other expenses, an end of police persecution of drivers, and the incorporation of the union in governmental decision-making (Za-beirou, November 24, 2016).

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

Contrary to the oil talk in Zinder and Diffa (and the uranium disputes and Tuareg rebellions in Agadez), ethnicity did not figure (prominently) in Niamey's public disputes. In Niamey, nationality, and not ethnicity, was at stake. The absence of ethnicity in public debate should, however, neither be understood as evidence of ethnic homogeneity, nor as an absence of ethnicity in politics, but rather as a sign of the hegemonic position of power from which political representation is established. Dominated by Zarma-Songhai, Niamey and its surrounding regions Dosso and Tillabéri are ethnically heterogeneous.⁹¹ As in Zinder, voting in these regions is typically along ethno-regionalist lines. The Alliance Nigérienne pour la Démocratie et le Progrès, (ANDP-Zaman Lahiya) is widely considered *the* Zarma-Songhai party of Dosso, and it receives most of its six percent of the national vote here. Until 2009, the party was led by Moumouni Adamou Djermakoye (1939–2009), a descendant of the most powerful ruling Zarma dynasty, the Zarmakoy of Dosso. Following Djermakoye's death during a demonstration against *Tazartché*,⁹² his brother took over the presidency. Since 2009, these regions have also been the electoral stronghold of Hama Amadou, a Fulani from Tillabéri, and president of the MODEN-FA Lumana party, which he formed after Tandja had ousted him from the MNSD in their fight over the presidency (see chapter 2).

In other words, oil nationalism in Niamey is not a rejection of ethnic politics per se, but rather highlights the area's hegemonic position, from which it claims to speak in the name of the entire Nigerien population. To understand the hegemonic position of western Niger, I will now outline how the area developed over time. Prior to 1902, when the French installed a military post and slowly transformed Niamey into a politically important town, it consisted of only five villages. This is not to say, however, that the area had no form of political organization before the French, as *Zindérois* narratives typically suggest. Indeed, when the French conquered Western Niger, two Zarma-Songhai empires with highly hierarchized and structured societies down to the village level existed there (Olivier de Sardan 1984). Areas of today's Tillabéri region were controlled by the Dendi kingdom (1592–1901), which had emerged out of the greater Songhai Empire (ca. 1000–1591); while the Dosso region of Niger was controlled by the Dosso Kingdom, which was founded by Zarma aristocracy around 1750 and brought all eastern Zarma people under a small state. While the Dendi Kingdom was ill prepared to defend itself and was easily conquered by the French in 1901, the French formed a military alliance with the Dosso Kingdom in the 1890s, and together they defeated other smaller Zarma states, and the larger Hausa states to the east. Hav-

⁹¹ Niamey is 51.1 percent Zarma-Songhai, 34.4 percent Hausa, 7.5 percent Fulani, 4.4 percent Tuareg, 0.5 percent Arab, 0.4 percent Gourmantché, 0.1 percent Tubu, and 0.3 percent other (INS-Niger 2011). Dosso is 48.1 percent Zarma-Songhai, 42.1 percent Hausa, 8.6 percent Fulani, 1 percent Tuareg, 0.1 percent Arab, 0.1 percent Kanuri, and 0.1 percent Gourmantché (ibid.). Tillabéri is 63.6 percent Zarma-Songhai, 12.6 percent Fulani, 11.1 percent Tuareg, 10.5 percent Hausa, 1.9 percent Gourmantché, 0.1 percent Arab, 0.1 percent Kanuri, and 0.1 percent other (ibid.).

⁹² Djermakoye's supporters, and the political opposition more generally, often claim that he was poisoned by the Tandja regime.

ing together defeated the Dosso's main enemies by 1898, the French military forces stayed in Dosso for the next 60 years. From then on, the Zarmakoy (aristocratic ruler) was integrated into the colonial system of French West Africa, the French allowing him to not only retain but actually expand his territory, and to maintain the pre-colonial state by choosing his own successors (Fuglestad 1983:67). Indeed, the French were so dependent on the Zarmakoy of Dosso for governing their colonial system that, in 1926, they moved the capital of the then Military Territory of Niger from Zinder to these villages in the west, which were to become Niamey. The French decision not only made Niamey Niger's largest city (from about 1,000 inhabitants in 1926 to over two million today), but also entrenched a western Nigerien hegemony. To preserve this hegemony, according to Ibrahim (1999:198), in 1976 Zarma-Songhai leaders established a secret organization called *Énergie de l'Ouest*, a thinktank to counter Hausa ambitions to power.⁹³ Indeed, Zarma hegemony has continued until today, at least in the perception of other ethnic groups in Niger and particularly in the collective Hausa identity narrative.

In short, in the entanglement of governable spaces (administrative regions) and histories of marginalization (Zinder and Diffa) and domination (Niamey), the oil infrastructure (oil wells, pipeline, refinery, transport, service stations) produced an oil nationalism in Niamey, alongside the regional identities of *Zindérois* and *Diffalais*. Specifically, the fact that oil was refined in Niger, its special importance as the lifeblood of urban economies, and Chinese involvement deemed pure business (rather than French involvement with its history of *Françafrique*) made it a national product for national use and created demands of a rightful share.

5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at how the dispersal of the new oil infrastructure over different administrative regions in Niger (re)produced collective identities by stitching together several otherwise temporally and spatially separated narratives. Specifically, *Zindérois* claimed favoritism toward western Niger and especially ethnic Zarma in the distribution of positions in the oil industry, relating this perceived bias to narratives about the historical political marginalization of the Damagaram sultanate, and demanding compensation in various forms – employment for local people, regional fuel prices, and a new petroleum law (see chapters 3 and 4). In contrast, in hegemonic discourse in Diffa, not only was there a bias toward western Niger and the Zarma, but also, through the construction of the oil refinery in Zinder, towards the *Zindérois*. Through this perceived deprivation and loss of economic opportunities, a collective regional *Diffalais* identity emerged as an alternative to the more established ethnic

⁹³ According to Idrissa and Decalo (2012:356), however, the organization *Energie de l'Ouest* was not established in 1976, but in response to the establishment of the Hausa organization AMACA, which itself was likely formed in either 1982 or 1989 (depending on which author you follow).

identities in the region. In public debate in Niamey, however, ethnic and regional belonging did not ostensibly play a significant role, as oil was rather conceptualized as a national good belonging to the Nigerien people as a whole. Though framed in nationalist terms, these arguments also drew on ethnic and regional identities, albeit unmarked identities. Moreover, in these narratives from the hegemonic West, *Zindérois* and *Diffalais* demands for regional favoritism and compensation were dismissed as undermining national unity.

6 Oil-Age Niger

Protests and riots around a diverse range of issues – including service delivery, public holidays, religiously-connoted events, elections, and legislative amendments – have been on the increase in Niger since 2013. The ACLED recorded 301 protest and riots between 1997 and 2022 in Niger, with most occurring in the capital Niamey (Raleigh et al. 2010). Students and civil society regularly take to the streets of Niamey, in the country's west. However, frequent violent protests and riots also occurred in the country's Eastern regions, including Zinder, Maradi and Diffa. As Figure 6.1 shows, the number of protests and riots fluctuated over time, and increased markedly between 2013 and 2020.⁹⁴

With the PNDS and MODEN-FA forming the government coalition and the MNSD and CDS forming the new opposition in March 2011, resistance against the new Issoufou regime first erupted around the opening of the oil refinery in Zinder in late 2011. Although the government did manage to restore peace after the December 8 riots through the cooptation and bribery of potential rivals in Zinder, this peace would prove short-lived. As I have described in the previous chapters, violent youth demonstrations reoccurred only four months later, first against water shortages, and then on International Workers Day. In September that year, further violence erupted

⁹⁴ The decline after 2020 may be related to the corona pandemic, although protests took also place against the government's covid19 measures.

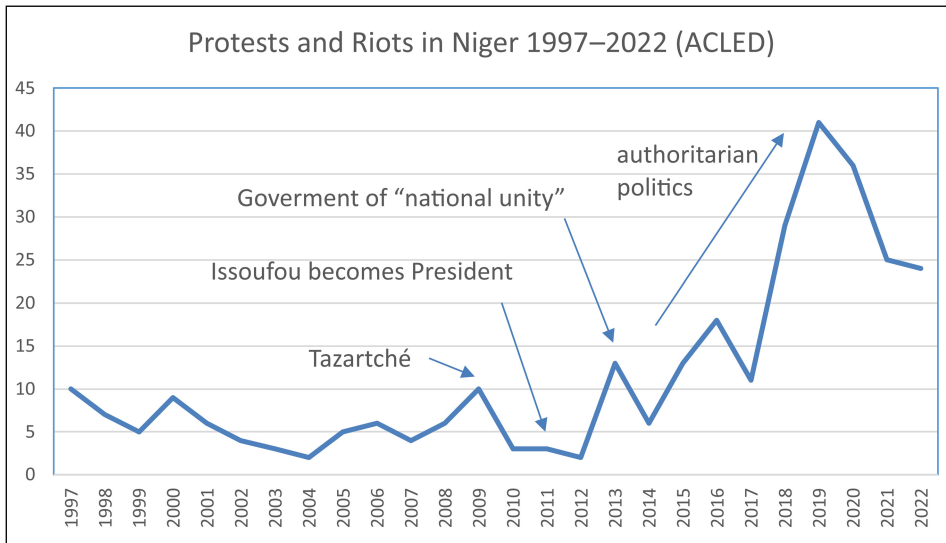


Figure 6.1: Protests and riots in 1997–2022 Niger, as compiled based on internet and radio claims by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); <http://www.acleddata.com>.

after Friday prayers, when hundreds of youths gathered to protest against the anti-Islamic movie “Innocence of Muslims”.

Protests then began to increase markedly after Issoufou called for a coalition of national unity in 2013. To establish the coalition, Issoufou had co-opted various politicians from opposition parties and brought them into his government, thereby fueling leadership conflicts within the parties and weakening them. As a result, Hama Amadou from the MODEN-FA Lumana left the government coalition and joined the opposition. With Hama becoming Issoufou’s main rival in the years to follow, the violent youth riots that had been characteristic to the marginalized eastern regions also began – and became increasingly frequent – in Niamey, Hama’s political stronghold. This is true despite increased state repression.

In 2015, religiously framed protests “against Charlie Hebdo” were held in Zinder after Friday prayers on 16 January and had spread to Niamey on the following day. The main protagonists in these protests were not fundamentalist religious groups, but rather disaffected male youth protesting against Issoufou’s presence at the solidarity march in France, the detested former colonial power, and rioting in the streets (Olivier de Sardan 2015; Schritt 2015b; Mueller 2016). Supporters of Hama and his party, MODEN-FA Lumana Africa, again led violent protests in Niamey around the 2016 presidential elections. In response, accusing civil society associations of playing politics by the opposition, the government cracked down on them. Again, in March 2018, large protests erupted in the capital against a new finance act, which the opposition called “satanic”. Moreover, protests erupted against the growing Western

military presence in the country – which had come after Issoufou allowed the fight against global terrorism and irregular migration to also take place on Niger territory.⁹⁵ In 2020, protests erupted against the anti-covid19 measures of the government and in 2021, the announcement of the election results immediately produced urban youth riots. When the Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI) announced on 23 February 2021 that Mohamed Bazoum had won the runoff elections against Mahamane Ousmane with 55,75%, Ousmane claimed manipulation and called his supporters to mobilize. A youth mob armed with clubs moved through the streets of Niamey and burned tires at crossroads. To all these protests, the government has increasingly reacted in a repressive and authoritarian manner, arresting several well-known civil society activists deemed close to the political opposition over the course of the last years. When Bazoum was deposed by the military on 26 July 2023, there were large demonstrations in support of the military junta and against the presence of foreign military forces in the country, particularly the French. These expressions of solidarity with the junta and anti-Western protest baffled many in the West, but they fit perfectly into the logic of the recurrent protest and the socio-political configuration in Niger in general.

The historical sedimentation, critical events and recurrent protests help uncover particular patterns of politics and society in contemporary Niger. Although protests in recent years have revolved around a number of different issues, they have unfolded in similar ways. Recent protests have been mostly mobilized by political opponents and have primarily occurred in opposition strongholds such as Zinder and Niamey. Zinder is dominated by Mahamane Ousmane who has been part of the opposition since 2011⁹⁶; and Niamey is the stronghold of Hama Amadou, who has been an opposition leader since 2013. Civil society activists appear to be embedded in the same structures as politicians, with some groups joining the opposition, while others remain with the incumbent government. At the same time, historically shaped collective identities, especially long-standing internal East-West rivalries, have played a crucial role in many protests. These collective regional identities are partly a result of French colonialism; and *Françafrique* remains a common bone of contention employed in all kinds of rhetoric against neocolonialism. Moreover, since democratization and the

⁹⁵ In the context of a growing instability of the Sahel-Saharan region and the EU's fight against both terrorism and irregular migration, net official development assistance for Niger has doubled from about 644 million USD since Mahamadou Issoufou's coming into power in 2011 to 1,223 billion in 2017 (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ODAT.CD?locations=NE>).

⁹⁶ After a leadership conflict within the CDS in 2014, Abdou Labo was elected party leader in place of Ousmane. Ousmane, who unsuccessfully tried to fight his loss of power in court, was finally expelled from the CDS-Rahama in November 2015. He then joined the Mouvement Nigérien pour le Renouveau Démocratique (MNRD-Hankuri) to run for presidency in 2016. In 2020, Ousmane was the presidential candidate for the Renouveau Démocratique et Républicain (RDE-Tchanji). Supported by Hama Amadou who was banned from running for President, Ousmane came second in the elections after Mohamed Bazoum. Zinder stronghold has thereby remained with Ousmane and not the CDS showing the strong personalization of political parties in Niger.

emergence of Islamic reform movements, religiously connoted protests have also been on the rise. Finally, with low prospects of upward mobility disaffected male youth have invariably spearheaded protests, while women seem to be effectively absent in the protests. Protests and riots in Niger are thus not only about socio-economic grievances (Mueller 2013, 2018) but also about politics in its various entangled dimensions. I turn to these dimensions in more detail now.

6.1 New Media and “Politics by Proxy” in Niger

The protest events show that politics are played through media technologies, especially mobile phones and radio. It was with the adoption of the multiparty system in 1993 that the state monopoly of the press, radio and television was abandoned and the freedom and independence of the media legally guaranteed.⁹⁷ In the political sphere today, television and the press (which is mainly limited to the capital Niamey, with only one monthly regional newspaper in Zinder, *Le Damagaram*) play a much less significant role than radio. The emergence of the radio as the primary medium of mass communication is perhaps not surprising given that information in Niger has traditionally been transmitted almost exclusively orally, as well as the fact that illiteracy is widespread, incomes are low, and the country’s territory is vast (Dan Moussa 1971). While the role of the internet is increasing with great speed today, especially with the development, distribution and increasing affordability of smartphones, the role of social media like Facebook or WhatsApp had remained marginal in the organization of the protests against the oil refinery’s inauguration but have become more and more important since then.

The development of classical media in Niger such as the radio started with colonialism. The first station to broadcast was the French colonial state’s Radio-Niger in October 1958. Created in 1967 and broadcast from Niamey, the Office de Radio-diffusion Télévision du Niger (ORTN) had a complete monopoly in postcolonial Niger until the end of autocratic rule in 1990. During this time, ORTN mainly used radio as an instrument of government propaganda. With the transition to democracy in the early 1990s, a regionalization, diversification and proliferation of radio took shape in Niger. With funding from the German development organization Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)⁹⁸, ORTN launched its first local station, the public service Voice of Zinder network in 1992 as part of a broader “Regionalization of radio in Niger” project (Ceesay 2000:102). As Ceesay (2000) shows, this regionalization triggered debates between the central government and the regions about the use of radio. Whereas the central government and civil servants

⁹⁷ Ordonnance n°93-29 du 30 mars 1993 portant régime de la liberté de la presse. Journal officiel (12) 4-7.

⁹⁸ In 2011, the GTZ merged together with two other German development organizations into the German Corporation for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)).

wanted to use radio for propaganda and the “development education” of the rural population, after three decades of authoritarian silence under one-party rule and military domination, the regions and ethnic groups were eager to use radio to have their own voice (ibid).

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

Generally, as Barber (2007) argues, the proliferation of media technologies has created, multiplied and transformed publics into audiences that are not known to the speakers, but who nevertheless try to imagine and address their needs and desires. Since the democratic transition, private-commercial radio stations have thereby become the most important resource in Zinder’s political arena. In “agenda setting”, the media plays an important role in affecting the public by influencing the topics to be discussed (Rössler 1997). As such, some Nigerien politicians have directly invested in media stations to diffuse their political programs.⁹⁹ In Niger, however, not only is private radio in part directly owned by the political elite, but political players can also attempt to frame public debate (set the agenda) by paying relatively small fees to release statements or organize on-air debates. Consequently, those social actors who lack formal recognition as members of political parties or civil society associations and who do not possess the financial power to buy broadcasts are typically denied broadcasting access. Thus, radio not only diffuses significations (of oil), but has also itself become a crucial element in how political negotiations and power struggles proceed, how social and political difference is reconstructed, and how patterns of domination are reinforced.

In a review article on the anthropology of radio, Bessire and Fisher (2013) show that radio is most often either celebrated as a democratizing vehicle with the potential to empower and emancipate the subaltern, for “giving voice to the voiceless”, or as a disciplinary instrument used by the state to consolidate power. The debate about

⁹⁹ At the same time, the government may choose to close down opposition media voices, some of them owned by opposition politicians. Tandja, for example, forced *dunia tv* and several newspapers to close after negative coverage of *Tazartché*.

whether radio can be seen as a democratizing vehicle holds especially true for African contexts, where a plurality of actors and radio stations emerged with the “wave of democratization” in the 1990s (Fardon and Furniss 2000; Frere 1996; Schulz 2012; Wasserman 2011; Hydén, Leslie, and Ogundimu 2002; Nyamnjoh 2005). My case study shows that radio represents a contested social field (Bourdieu 2005) with different social and political actors trying to use it for their political projects. This is in line with observations made by Stremmlau, Fantini and Osman (2015:1511) who argue that radio programs in Somalia can be “understood as ‘staged events’, shaped by power, political interests and economic agendas, rather than simply as opportunities for citizens to make their voices heard”. Moreover, these events reproduce existing power structures, albeit in new forms (ibid.). In Zinder’s public political sphere, radio has rarely given voice to the voiceless: the subalterns have minimal access to broadcasting, with their interests typically mediated by paternalistic representatives who employ their grievances to pursue their own political projects, and thereby tailoring these grievances to suit their own agendas. Subaltern access to the media is limited but does exist in newer media formats like talk-back radio, or avenues outside the official news media like texting, rumor, or gossip (Ellis 1989; Besnier 2009).

However, radio is more than a simple resource that is absorbed into a pre-existing political game. Rather, it has diverse material qualities and cultural possibilities that enable and transform public political life in sometimes unexpected ways (Larkin 2008, 2013). The proliferation of private radio broadcasting offers a new means of public representation and has led to the emergence of new forms of charismatic authority (Vokes 2007). In Niger, for example, Dan Dubai successfully used radio (and mobile phone messages) to present himself as a folk hero daring to speak in the name of the poor. In addition, radio has spurred new forms of cultural organization in Niger, such as the Zinder *fada* initiated at least in part by a radio moderator of Anfani to encourage youth performing charitable work. New forms of cultural organization have also arisen through associative community stations, and especially through the nationwide Alternative. In allowing civil society organizations a platform to express their views and organize, Alternative played an important role in the 2005 “protests against the high costs of living”. Indeed, offering this access has made it a vital player in the growth of Nigerien civil society. In other words, it is only by considering the interaction between radio and politics in Niger that we can develop an understanding of the specific character of the local political dynamics (of oil). In this sense, radio has not only become an important device within political players’ tactical repertoire, but also plays an important role in shaping the *how* of contemporary Nigerien politics.

In more recent times, the media technology to have had the most profound new influence on Nigerien politics is the mobile phone (at least at the time of writing). Indeed, the mobile phone has revolutionized the lives of millions of Africans (Etzo and Collender 2010). In Niger, as in other African contexts, it has also become an instrument of political agitation that has changed the nature of the public political game. This case study has shown that texting allowed for the emergence of “smart mobs” (Rheingold 2002) or “people who are able to act in concert even if they don’t

know each other” (ibid.:xii). The anonymity possible when texting via unregistered SIM cards allowed for new rhizomatic forms of organizing, mobilizing and leading massed groups, and in general, a more uncontrolled form of dissemination. In contrast, access to radio as a mouthpiece is more restricted, as it is controlled by journalists and requires greater financial flows. However, rather than celebrating the accessibility of new media forms for enabling democratic activism, as has often and most prominently been the case in the “Arab Spring”, it seems the same applies for mobile phones as for radio: that is, it is not fixed whether and which social and political actors will be able to translate the new media into their political programs. Whereas the Zinder riots at first appeared to be “politics from below”, they were also “politics from above”. My case study showed that at least some, if not the majority, of the text messages promoting protest and violence were, in fact, designed by influential political players to mobilize the population against the government. Nevertheless, the case study also revealed politics from below, in that transmission and dissemination of the messages required youth to forward the messages to as many people as possible. Thus, technologies should neither be understood as liberating nor enslaving in and of themselves, but rather as embedded into social, economic and political structures which enable and restrict their potentials.

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

6.2 Nigerien Political Machines

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

I have never voted. I am not interested in politics. I do not have any brothers or friends who do politics so that I can vote for them. Perhaps I will now begin voting, as I have a neighbor who is with Lumana. If he wants, I will vote for him. But the problem is, when they leave for Niamey, they will forget you. They don't even know you. They won't give you anything back. There are no politicians who are morally good. (male, late 30s)

His statement illustrates three important aspects of Nigerien politics: First, elections in Nigerien politics are not primarily fought or won along ideological lines but are rather based on patterns of redistribution. A 2016 study on the political economy of voter engagement in Niger reinforces this point by showing how the clientelist electoral system functions, with political parties mainly mobilizing voters through the distribution of electoral rent (McCullough, Harouna, and Oumarou 2016). As a result, the mobilizing activists' loyalty to a particular candidate is primarily based on his (and sometimes her) ability to provide material benefits, rather than on an ideological loyalty to a particular party or its program (ibid.:2). The result is an "activist market" with so-called "pop-up activists" – that is, activists who are willing to mobilize people to attend political meetings in return for small envelopes of cash and goodies during election season" (ibid.:3). In turn, parties select activists – especially well-known opinion leaders like student and youth leaders or musicians – based on their presumed ability to mobilize larger groups of people. This logic of political mobilization makes use of and reinforces generational divisions and the gap between the wealthy and the poor in Niger, a country with a tiny, older political elite (the *évolués*) that emerged with French colonialism, and an overwhelming majority of poor and/or unemployed, most of whom are youths (see subchapter on waithood below). At the same time, this underlying logic of elections also allows for the mobilization and organization of protests. *Palais* members in Zinder have openly affirmed that political opponents distribute money to them to take part in demonstrations and support them in case of arrest.

Second, social solidarity is based on personal, mostly family networks, as well as networks of friends and neighbors. These infamous networks, typically referred to in Niger as PAC (*Parents, Amis et Connaissances*), are crucial for finding work, asking for favors, or receiving support. As such, they have an existential dimension: in an economy without any real state social security system, the population depends on mutual assistance within social networks to survive. However, these networks also place significant pressure and demands on employed people with a good position, for they are expected to redistribute their earnings, provide favors, or to misuse their power to benefit their PAC. Because finding paid employment or being in a position of power raises expectations to redistribute the earnings or provide favors within the personal

network, status, morality and personal integrity are closely tied to a moral economy of gift-giving and redistribution (Olivier de Sardan 1999a). Electoral candidates, for example, often use development money to prove their commitment and bonds to their home regions (Tidjani Alou 2015b). Politicians and state bureaucrats are therefore caught in numerous “normative double-binds”: that is, the paradoxical formal moral orders of official office and informal social rules (Bierschenk 2014; Olivier de Sardan 2014b).

Third, there is a negatively charged moral discourse on politics in Niger. With the introduction of national elections in 1993, structural “rivalries of proximity” within a small national political elite emerged (Olivier de Sardan 2017). These rivalries have not been primarily programmatic or ideological in nature, but rather personal attempts to gain privilege, bribes and postings. Nigerien political parties are dominated by their founding leaders and have somewhat underdeveloped electoral programs. *Faire la politique* (doing politics), as it is generally referred to in Niger, is seen paradoxically as both acting outside the moral and ethical values of the community, and as the only way to find employment or to be included in redistribution networks. Indeed, the words *politik* in Zarma or *dan ubanci* in Hausa signify conflicts, rivalry, disputes, and disunity, and evoke a nostalgic view of the “stability” of former military regimes (Olivier de Sardan 2017:120). This has now manifested itself in the support of mostly urban youth for the military junta in 2023.

Taken together, I contend that politics in Niger are best understood through the notion of “political machines” (Scott 1969). Political machines are characterized by urban reward networks in which particularistic, material rewards are used to extend control over personnel and to maximize electoral support, thereby favoring patronage, spoils, and corruption (ibid.). Without any established catch-all parties financed by mass membership, political power in Niger is built on the support of wealthy businessman. As elections were of little to no importance prior to the era of multi-party democracy, external funding was not needed, and therefore business did not play such a significant role in politics. Initially, the emergence of democracy in the early 1990s shifted power to civilians, labor unions and intellectuals. However, with growing demands to fund campaigns, a merchant class emerged in Nigerien politics; and by 2005, major traders and merchants already held over 80% of the seats in the National Assembly (Maccatory et al. 2010:351; Villalón and Idrissa 2005:45). From a comparative perspective then, political machines appear to primarily occur in a political arena featuring elections, universal suffrage and a high degree of electoral competition, but in a social context that is considered to favor patronage, spoils, and corruption (Scott, 1969). While political machines emerged in Niger with the introduction of electoral competition and in a context of a “moral economy of corruption” (Olivier de Sardan, 1999a), it is interesting that the concept of political machines in African studies was only used for one-party systems (Bienen 1971), and has since been largely ignored, although the conditions for the emergence of political machines only truly came into existence with the “wave of democratization” in the 1990s. While the concept of political machines does not seem well-suited for an analysis of no or one-party states, be-

cause the main element of electoral competition is either missing or at least highly restricted, by the time African states had turned into multi-party systems, the paradigm of neopatrimonialism (and its atemporal and culturalist explanations) had already successfully conquered African studies (Olivier de Sardan 2014a).

The paradigm of neopatrimonialism effectively qualifies African states both as national cultural containers and negative deviations from the West (Hauck et al. 2013). In contrast, I see the Nigerien parties as “Janus-faced” political machines that are both “extraverted” and “introverted” (Bayart 2009). The functioning of political machines is highly dependent on monetary flows from natural resource extraction, international donors and national businessmen, and the acceptance of this money by militants, activists and voters in exchange for support. However, rather than qualifying African states as corrupt and Western states as sound, I rather see a relative difference; whereas corruption in the West is more restricted to a politico-economic elite, in African countries such as Niger, it is also characterized by a petty corruption due to an existential dimension and moral obligations of social networks as a form of social security and survival. In this sense, it is not so much “traditional culture” which brings forth the phenomena of corruption and cronyism, as the model of neopatrimonialism would suggest, but rather economic (social networks of subsistence and survival in the absence of a welfare state) and political realities (competition in multi-party systems) which favor the emergence of political machines.

6.3 The Social and Political Embeddedness of Civil Society

The civil society in Niger is made up of a host of organizations including peasant organizations, trade unions, human rights movements, Islamic associations, professional groupings, (inter)sectoral federations, development organizations, formal and informal local committees, networks, groupings and foundations, as well as some high-profile and highly mediatized organizations led by former student leaders and unionists which dominate the public sphere (Lavigne Delville 2015:58). Exacerbated by structural adjustment programs and the absence of a welfare state in Niger, large parts of the society, including civil society organizations, find themselves living in a precarious state. In these conditions, “getting along” (*se débrouiller*) is often tied to financial flows, positions and jobs found in the political sphere which offers one of the few opportunities for securing an income (Lavigne Delville 2015). However, there is also a distinction between more introverted civil society associations such as CRAS and extraverted development organization labelled NGOs. While the extraverted NGOs must primarily align with the agenda of their international donors for financial flows to continue and thus rarely engage in public politics, introverted civil society associations play the public political game, because it is here that they can access (informal) financial flows.

Looking at concrete practices of doing civil society and representations of seeing civil society, a gap between practices and representations becomes apparent. In numer-

ous biographical and semi-structured interviews that I conducted with civil society activists in Niger, they presented themselves as fighting for democracy and transparency, as helping the poor and disadvantaged against the abuse of power of the country's corrupt political elite (cf. Yarrow 2011 for Ghana). To underline their fight for the collective good, they often referred to the state repression, arrests and frequent imprisonment of civil society leaders in Niger. However, as they often accused other civil society activists of not following their collective fight but rather of being *prébendiers*, the interviews already hinted at the patterns of cooptation, bribery and corruption which became even clearer through my participant observation of CRAS. In addition, talking to a wide range of different people during my fieldwork, I had the impression that a large part of the population in Niger had lost their faith in the country's civil society, often accusing activists of playing the political game to enrich themselves rather than to benefit society as a whole.

Thus, in understanding the role of civil society in Niger, it is essential to focus on state-society relations and how these relations evolved historically. While a few, rather restricted civil society associations mediated government programs to the population and thus had close ties to the ruling party during the authoritarian phase of Nigerien politics, the reintroduction of the multiparty system soon highlighted how the rules of the game had changed. From that time on, political competition and strategic conflicts between the opposition and the government majority became an integral part of the game. This also had implications for the role of civil society organizations. Since their legitimization as a counter-power to the state in the post-transition constitutions after 1990, civil society organizations have successfully sought to influence and to become co-opted into political machines. With their ability to act as counter-powers to the state in a multi-party system, civil society had to be appeased, repressed or incorporated into government by political maneuvers such as bribery, co-optation, intimidation, and political arrest. In a context of political machines such as Niger, we therefore observe episodic civil society engagement in the political game, with phases of high activity when organizations are seeking to pressure the government, and phases of low activity or invisibility when they have become co-opted, or simply calmed down by informal redistribution (Waal and Ibreck 2013). As figure 6.1 above illustrates, this episodic engagement has been visible in the fluctuation of protests since the start of democratization.

The dynamics of civil society in political machines can explain the six strong tendencies that Tidjani Alou (2015a) identified amongst civil society organizations in Niger: proliferation, professionalization, regrouping, political intervention, personalization, and an urban anchor. Political intervention is the first means of introducing oneself as a new negotiating party, to gain political leverage, and to be rewarded with spoils. An urban anchor is needed for successful political intervention, as urbanization processes assemble political power in a dense space that enables acts of infrastructural sabotage (such as demonstrations, ghost town operations, burning barricades, strikes and meetings) which can stop the flow of urban life and the economy. In contrast, rural resistance in Niger is characterized by passivity or non-movements, involving strategies

of non-compliance and tax boycotts (Spittler 1983). Professionalization is the result of governing techniques, either through co-optation in the state's administrative body, or through external funding from local businessmen or international donors, as well as status politics within organizations and committees to claim leadership positions. Personalization and proliferation are the results of a "rent of political liberalization", in which membership of a civil society association becomes an important source of income, be it through external funding, daily allowances for work on governmental committees, or informal contributions from political players. Finally, the very result of episodic civil society engagement, regrouping is necessary to (again) acquire political capital after processes of personalization and co-optation have either hampered the association's negotiating power or led to its disintegration.

In short, the assumed and Eurocentric dichotomy between the state and civil society cannot simply be transferred to the Nigerien context.¹⁰⁰ This dichotomy's normative and moral framework is misleading because it entails positive connotations of political progress, legitimate grievances, and a better social order (Mamdani 1995; Macamo 2011). Rather, civil society engagement is embedded into the same structures that shape other political actors, including their opponents. In this way, the values and language of contemporary democracy – transparency, good governance, human rights – are primarily appropriated to acquire political legitimacy, and do not signal the development of emancipatory politics *per se*. Especially prone to political party cooptation is the introverted civil society which, in having understood the logic of the political game over time, might even anticipate government positions or informal contributions as spoils, while more extroverted civil society most often aligns their political agendas to those of their international donors (which can also be seen as a form of external cooptation). However, organizational leaders also know how to constantly and strategically switch between these positions, and many are in charge of several different introverted and extroverted civil society organizations.

Looking at the historically sedimented social and political order of Niger thus revealed that Niger's civil society is embedded into society and politics alike. Here a paradox emerges: while the civil society activists' (and politicians') social networks demand the redistribution of spoils captured in politics among the network members, the credibility of civil society leaders (and politicians) among the wider population outside of their personal networks rests on their ability to avoid playing the same dirty political game. Within this logic of Nigerien politics and society, it seems that civil society activists cannot achieve the moral high ground that they often claim over politicians.

¹⁰⁰ The concept of civil society as a realm separated from the state is an ideal deeply rooted in European political thought and is therefore profoundly Eurocentric (Hann and Dunn 1996). Even in Europe, this remains little more than an ideal. In reality, an empowering state is required for an active and powerful civil society to develop and function (Levy 1999).

6.4 Ethnicity and Opposition Strongholds in Nigerien Politics

The riots after 2011 first occurred mainly in Zinder before switching to Diffa and Niamey in 2013. I here investigate the significance of ethnicity and regional political strongholds in Nigerien politics.

Niger is composed of several ethnic groups. According to the 1988 census, the population was 21.2% Zarma-Songhai (dominating western Niger), 53% Hausa (dominating southern Niger), 10.4% Tuareg (dominating northern Niger), 9.9% Fulani (which are spread throughout the country, mostly along the Sahel-Saharan belt), 4.4% Kanuri (dominating south-eastern Niger), 0.4% Tubu (dominating the area along the Niger-Chad border), 0.3% Arab (mostly in northern and eastern Niger), 0.3% Gourmantché (living in western Niger), and 0.2% other groups (INS-Niger 2011).

However, this official ethnic breakdown did not and does not necessarily translate into ethnic politics. If voting behavior is mostly built on the distribution of material rewards, as it is in political machines, we would not expect ethnicity to be a significant factor for parties, although ethnic identity may be a criterion for selecting “pop-up activists” who can mobilize their kinsmen. Moreover, successive regimes have sought to weaken ethnic and regional identities in Niger; since the formation of the First Republic of Niger in 1960, it has been against the constitution to form political parties based on an ethnic, regional, or religious character. When the country’s second president, Seyni Kountché, allowed for associations to build his *société de développement*, he prohibited any organization with an ethnic or regional character¹⁰¹, and even forbade references to ethnicity in public debates. To further break down ethnic identities by promoting inter-ethnic and inter-regional marriages, and to counteract corruption based on networks of kinship and solidarity, Kountché also started to post state bureaucrats outside their native regions.

The turn to democracy in the early 1990s opened new possibilities for an ethnicization of politics, and many of the parties that did emerge had an ethnic core (Ibrahim and Niandou-Souley 1998). At its foundation, the MNSD-Nassara was the party of notables in military, bureaucracy and business and had, as the direct successor of the previous military regimes, nationwide coverage (ibid.:150). Although the MNSD-Nassara was originally a party dominated by Zarma, the ethnic group which mainly constituted the country’s political elite during the autocratic period, the fact that Mamadou Tandja, a Kanuri-Fulani from the Diffa region won the internal race for the party’s presidency gave it a new, non-ethnic appeal. Tandja’s opponent, Moumouni Adamou Djermakoye, founded the Alliance Nigérienne pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (ANDP-Zaman Lahiya) in order to win Zarma votes. Following Djermakoye’s death in 2009 and the foundation of the MODEN-FA Lumana Africa party the same

¹⁰¹ Ordonnance n° 84-6 du 1er mars 1984, portant régime des associations, Art. 2, p.430. http://www.justice.gouv.ne/images/lois/pdfs/recueil_thematique_de_textes_legislatifs_et_reglementaires.pdf.

year, the western regions of Niger became the electoral stronghold of Hama Amadou, a Fulani from Tillabéri. Hama had founded the party after Tandja ousted him from the MNSD-Nassara in the leadership conflict during the *Tazartché* campaign. In the early 1990s, the CDS-Rahama emerged as a regionalist-cultural party of Hausaland (especially Maradi and Zinder), an explicit response to western-Zarma hegemony. The party's electoral strategy was to win the support of the Hausa majority by underlining the historical political marginalization of the East; this historic marginalization also remains an important factor in the country's political disputes today. In contrast, the PNDS-Tarayya was primarily founded as a socialist party containing a broad cross-section of the Nigerien left and was thus the most ideologically committed and non-ethnic party in Niger (Ibrahim and Niandou-Souley 1998). However, the party still wins most of its seats in Tahoua, the home region of its leader, Mahamadou Issoufou. Moreover, by being drawn into the logic of political machines over almost three decades of democracy, with ever changing alliances, institutional breakdowns and extroverted policymaking to acquire international financial flows, the PNDS-Tarayya is today mostly a socialist party by name, and not by ideology or program.

Taken together, ethnicity seems to crisscross political mobilization based on material rewards, making it not an either/or but rather a both/and question. In a comparative study of political parties in West African countries, Basedau and Stroh (2012) found ethnicity to be more politicized in Niger and Benin than in Burkina Faso and Mali. They concluded that the differences could be explained by historical legacies, socio-cultural relationships, and rationalist voting behavior. In this sense, the role of ethnicity in politics appears to depend on the mobilization strategies of elites, rather than on the collective interests of identity groups (*ibid.*). It is striking that the recurrent protests in Niger have not only occurred in regions such as Zinder (with its claims to historical political marginalization), but also in other regional opposition strongholds. Indeed, the fact that the capital Niamey itself has since 2013 repeatedly been a stage of violent riots illustrates the importance of political opposition strongholds for protest action in Niger.

In sum, regional and ethnic collective identities are constantly played out by politicians who can build on deep histories of political marginalization that came with French colonialism.

6.5 *Françafrique*, Rhetorics of Neocolonialism and Conspiracy Theories

The presidents of the former French colonies Mali, Niger, Togo, Benin, Gabon and Senegal attended the *Je suis Charlie* demonstration in Paris on 11 January 2015, triggering protests in each country. This resistance illustrates the immediacy of the history of *Françafrique* in public national discourses in the former colonies. This is especially the case in Niger, where the demonstrations turned particularly violent, for two reasons. First, the economy of Niger is closely tied to the French parastatal company Or-

ano (formerly Areva), which has exploited uranium in the country's north since 1971. For while Niger is the world's fourth-largest producer of uranium, it is frequently ranked last on the Human Development Index, an incongruity that is highly salient in the national public discourse and has time and again triggered protests against Areva and "French neocolonialism". Second, when the international community enacted sanctions against Tandja's regime in 2009 in response to his attempts to abolish the presidential term limits, he powerfully (re)produced the rhetoric of neocolonialism in Niger, blaming "the West" and its meddling in Nigerien politics for the country's "underdevelopment". These historical and political economy entanglements have produced a uranium-political configuration in Niger which is closely tied to neocolonial discourses (Schritt 2016a). On the contrary, Chinese oil production in Niger is characterized as a "win-win relationship" of pure business that comes with political "non-interference" (Schritt, 2016b). For this reason, "the West" is the target of discontent in the country.

In contrast to the widespread support Tandja received in his portrayal of himself as a strong leader able to resist Western neocolonial interference, Issoufou was widely insulted and abused in social media outlets for taking part in the *Je suis Charlie* demonstration in Paris. On the Facebook group *15000 nigerien sur facebook*¹⁰² users called Issoufou a puppet of Western regimes. One post, for example, caricatured French president François Hollande holding a monkey resembling Issoufou on a leash, who in turn had a baby monkey resembling Commander Salou Djibo – the coup leader who had ousted Tandja – on his back. The caricature refers to a widespread suspicion that France orchestrated the military coup against Tandja to install a president loyal to its interests. Similarly, France is still widely seen as responsible for the 1974 military coup against Niger's first post-independence president, Diori Hamani, although new access to archival material shows that France was not involved and had even considered measures for his re-installment (van Walraven 2014).

Looking more closely at the posts on *15000 nigerien sur facebook* reveals a number of popular discourses about *Françafrique*, neocolonialism, and the world order. Aside from posts from Nigerien press outlets and risqué or controversial comments, anti-imperialist and/or anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are plentiful. In these posts, "France", "the USA", "the West" or "the Jews" are said to be behind all the evils in Africa and the world. Many of the conspiracy theories involving colonialism, Zionism, superpowers, oil, and the war on terror have travelled from the Arab World and are perpetuated through terrorist propaganda such as by Al-Qaeda, but also through popular media outlets like Al-Jazeera and social media such as Facebook, twitter, and WhatsApp (Gray 2010). Of course, these neocolonial narratives and conspiracy theories are highly situational, popping up around particular events before retreating into the background again.

The high currency of these conspiracy theories needs to be situated in the context of Western neoliberal capitalism that, on the one hand, produces enormous wealth

¹⁰² Renamed *1,000,000 nigerien sur facebook* the Facebook group had more than 200,000 followers in 2021.

and, on the other, renders large parts of the population in the Global South redundant, thus fueling a general feeling of global marginalization. By connecting and to some extent conflating regional (the West versus the Global South) with religious identities (Christians/Jews versus Muslims), notions of Western imperialism become entangled with a general feeling of Judeo-Christian world domination over a marginalized Muslim world (with the Israel-Palestine conflict typically taken as the case of reference).

6.6 Islam, Islamic Reform Movements and Religious Coexistence in Niger

At least formally a politically secular nation, Niger is a predominantly Muslim and very pious society. Approximately 94% of the population identify as Muslim, with the other six percent following African religious traditions or Christianity. Religion has a powerful affective dimension in the country, with 91% stating that religion is “very important” in their life and that they actively practice their religion on a daily basis.¹⁰³

In an overview of Islamic reform movements in Africa, Loimeier (2016) identifies an Islamic historical legacy for Niger that is both pre- and post-jihadist, combining local religious traditions such as the Bori spirit possession cult with Islamic practices introduced by a jihadist movement in the early 19th century. Sufi brotherhoods of Sunni Islam, especially the dominant Tijāniyyah known for combining African traditions into Islamic practice, are strongly represented in Niger. With the advent of democratization in the 1990s, a Salafi-oriented reform movement called Yan Izala blossomed, and began to contest the “pagan”, “supernatural”, and “unwritten” Islamic practices of the Tijāniyyah on a national scale.

Started in neighboring Nigeria in the late 1970s, the Yan Izala movement began in Niger in Maradi in 1987. After democratization, the Association pour la Diffusion de l’Islam au Niger (ADINI-Islam) was formed to spread the movement, which it did effectively, triggering changes in fashion, lifestyle, marriage practices and gender relations (Masquelier 2009). Despite the fact that all Nigerien governments have defended the principle of *laïcité* since democratization to preserve their privileged access to state power, and that the state established the Conseil Islamique du Niger (CIN) in 2003 to tighten control over religious associations, politicians have also made use of Islam to ideologically foster their political legitimacy. As Elischer (2015) argues, this state regulation has been successful both in maintaining peaceful and apolitical domestic Salafi associations, and in containing the emergence of a “political” or “Jihadi Salafism”¹⁰⁴ in Niger which is significantly more prominent in neighboring West African countries. Religious authorities, in turn, including the increasing number of Salafi-oriented

¹⁰³ See Afrobarometer surveys: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220406075830/https://afrobarometer.org/countries/niger-01>.

¹⁰⁴ In Islamic studies, a distinction is commonly made between peaceful “Quietists”, “Political Salafists”, and violent “Jihadists” (Elischer 2015:583).

groups, tend to avoid any displays of political involvement, as it is difficult to claim a connection between a pious lifestyle and the overwhelmingly negatively loaded notion of politics in Niger (Sounaye 2016).

According to Charlick (2007b), the success of Yan Izala should not simply be attributed to a backlash against globalization. Rather, he argues that Yan Izala fills a need amongst certain societal segments to modernize on their own terms, rejecting both Western-dominated modernization and the traditional social and normative constructs of their own society. Indeed, in its early years, Yan Izala was supported in great numbers by wealthy traders and powerful merchants, for whom membership became a sign of social distinction (Grégoire 1992); and by youth for whom membership was an opportunity to challenge tradition and customary authorities, and for whom the ideology of Yan Izala best matched their aspirations of upward mobility (Masquelier 2009). As a result, and although they were not members, many educated youths I met sympathized (at least to some degree) with Salafi-oriented movements.

The growth of new Islamic reform movements in Niger has seen the development of violent factions. The rise of Yan Izala had first triggered religious conflicts with the Tijāniyyah. These conflicts turned particularly violent in 1992 and 1993, flaring up at different times, before calming down again by the early 2000s. As a growing movement, Yan Izala had a profound effect on public discourse, intensifying resistance to government policy in the name of the Islam. Most significantly, it pushed for an Islamization of the state and society and led public resistance and protest against the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), the institutional implementation of women rights, “pagan” customs like the Bori cult, and the “Westernization” of Nigerien culture. In 1998, in response to the rapid growth of evangelical Christianity in the Sahel, violence against Christians began, rising sharply the following year, and culminating in urban riots in Maradi and Niamey on 8 November 2000 against the second annual International Festival of African Fashion (B. Cooper 2003). During the riots, bars and churches were attacked and burned down, and symbols of Bori spiritual culture were desecrated (*ibid.*).

Unlike in 2000, however, only some of the protestors against Charlie Hebdo in 2015 were dressed in white Islamic clothing, and it appears that many of the protesting youth led a relatively secular and western-oriented lifestyle, dressing in western clothes, drinking alcohol, and enjoying the nightlife and music in bars. Indeed, on several occasions I heard that the same youth who had burned down the bars had also helped themselves to the drinks. It is therefore no surprise that although the vast majority of the Nigerien population shared the grievances against the caricatures of Charlie Hebdo, many people saw protesting youths primarily as “gangsters” or “hooligans” who were either mobilized by politicians, or as opportunistic free-riders who used the opportunity for personal gain by looting, pillaging and plundering, thus negatively affecting the legitimacy of their complaints among the Nigerien population.

To understand the seeming contradiction in popular discourses between admiration for the Salafi-oriented reform movements and denouncement of the youth protestors as “gangsters”, we have to look more closely at the situation of (male) youth in Niger.

6.7 Waithood, Violence and Patriarchy

Niger has the highest birth rate of any country in the world, with 6.89 children born per woman, and an annual population growth of 3.3%. With a median age of 15, 70% of the population is under twenty-five, with 63% living below the international poverty line. There is mass youth unemployment, and the few economic opportunities available are typically low paid, such as motorcycle taxi drivers (*kabou kabou*) or small street vendors. As such, urban youth have to wait increasingly longer to marry, found a family, and become contributing members of the community. The situation of youth has thus been described as “waithood” (Honwana 2012) and is typically understood as “a prolonged and uncertain stage between childhood and adulthood that is characterized by their inability to enter the labor market and attain the social markers of adulthood” (ibid.:19). Young men’s inability to perform socially desirable masculinity also has major repercussions for women’s performance of femininity, as Honwana (2012:24) argues: “[W]omen’s ability to attain the social status of adulthood depends on men’s moving beyond waithood”.

Young men and women thus experience waithood in different ways. The markers of adulthood vary according to gender roles within a society. As a predominantly Muslim society, (Hausa) hegemonic masculinity in Niger is connected to Islamic views on marriage and masculine domination and has thus been constructed as protective of “female weakness” and a man’s duty to be the bread winner and provide everything for his wife or wives (Salamone 2004). In contrast, female adulthood is attached to the private sphere of marriage, motherhood, and care giving (ibid.). Moreover, both customary law and the recently growing phenomenon of wife seclusion (*kubli* in Hausa) privilege men’s access to land and increasingly lock women into the house compound (Henquinet 2007). As a result of the gender segregation and a lack of opportunity for young men in Niger, a “culture of masculine waiting” has emerged in public spaces (Masquelier 2013). With public politics the domain of men, women have largely been invisible in the violent protests and riots. This is not to say, however, that women have been passive or inactive. Women have indeed resisted the two patriarchal dominations in Niger, one embodied by the Islamic religious authorities and the other by the secular state, the heir to a form of patriarchy imposed by the colonial authorities (Alidou 2005). However, women have often mobilized around gender struggles and other issues by trying to advance their agendas at the negotiating table rather than through (violent) protests (Kang 2015).

In a situation of waiting, large segments of the youth population, especially young men, organize themselves into informal neighborhood groups called *fada* and *palais*. *Fada* began to emerge with the democratization process in the 1990s and the rise of unemployment fueled by the SAP. *Fada* are effectively conversation groups that meet for tea ceremonies lasting up to several hours, and in which youth from the same neighborhood meet to socialize and exchange information, debate politics, gossip, talk about job opportunities, play cards, and listen to the radio or music. In other words,

fada make time, which is otherwise experienced as boredom, meaningful (Masquelier 2013). While *fada* were first associated with charitable works such as tree planting and neighborhood clean-ups, most of these charitable activities have since ceased, and some of the *fada* have morphed into youth gangs called *palais*. *Palais* are a more recent phenomenon, having started around 2007, especially in Zinder. According to a study on youth violence in Zinder, there were approximately 320 *fada* or *palais* in 2012, of which 73 percent were men only, 10 percent were women only, and 17 percent were mixed (Souley 2012:10). Many of the *palais* have chosen English names based on (imagined) US-American gang names like “Capital King”, “City Boys”, “Big Money”, “Gang Boy”, or “Style Gang”. In contrast to *fada*, the activities of *palais* center more on drug consumption, street fights, crime, violence, and sex. This violence, in particular, has been a matter of growing public concern for several years. Whereas the *fada* are mostly non-hierarchically organized, affirming a spirit of egalitarianism and comradeship, the *palais* are highly hierarchical organizations with a leader often referred to as *chef*, *boss*, *président*, or *shugaba* (Souley 2012). Marginalized city quarters particularly affected by poverty such as Kara Kara, traditionally an area for people affected by leprosy in Hausa society, often have high numbers of *palais* (ibid.).

Due to the country’s changing demography and increasing violence, male youth are increasingly becoming a force to be reckoned with in Nigerien politics. While male youth have primarily become significant discursively as a threat to society, they are also aware of this discourse. In interviews and talk-back radio, youths appropriated the narrative of a “ticking time-bomb”, publicly threatening, for example, government authorities of an “explosion” or even “to make Boko Haram”. Having taken part myself in three different youth groupings in Niamey and Zinder, many of the grievances members voice in *fada* and *palais* are directed against the government, who they blame for a lack of employment opportunities or access to participation in politics. For young men then, violence offers one of the few effective channels to make their voices heard. In turn, they are the “critical mass” that has to be governed and controlled, becoming targets of the political machines to rally behind either the government or the opposition. The hierarchically structured *palais* are particularly easy prey for political machines that reward youth leaders for mobilizing their followers. With desperation levels of unemployment in African post-colonies, youth are “constantly available to be put to use for virtually any form of labour” (Hoffman 2011). In this context, youth groups offer violence as a form of labor available to the highest bidder on the market, rather than as a political act performed along ideological lines (ibid). In this sense, several youth leaders who were at the forefront of the violent protests around the refinery’s inauguration in 2011 later became members of the newly created youth organizations, and with their newly gained privileges immediately distanced themselves from the violence. This is not to say, however, that the youths are not self-conscious about providing loyalty to politicians or businessmen as a kind of job. I often heard from youths (and civil society activists) that accepting money or other kinds of material rewards is a kind of contractual agreement which ends immediately after the job is done.

Taken together, violence in Niger is primarily the domain of young men who dominate the public sphere and who are mobilized by political machines, whereas women have not played a visible, public role in such protests. By engaging in the production of disorder during protests, the situation of youths also displays a new kind of order in which male youths become a growing matter of concern in public and politics; in this order, political actors do not primarily seek to address youth issues but rather new mechanisms of repression, control and co-optation.

6.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have abstracted out from the patterns of recurrent protests to create a broader picture of the historically sedimented and fragmented order in contemporary Nigerien politics and society. This order is neither homogenous nor static nor can it be understood by looking at some opaque notion of culture. Rather, I showed the number and scale of protests in Niger has increased through the emergence and coming together of various structural drivers, including political machines, new media technologies and politics by proxy, a politically and socially embedded civil society in a new democratic era, a strong rhetoric of neocolonialism in public debate, the spread of Salafism, Issoufou's coming to power and the subsequent emergence of Zinder and Niamey as the opposition strongholds, and a situation of youth waithood paired with an increasing violent youth masculinity. It is this historically sedimented and fragmented socio-political order – and not “African culture” – that provides the fertile ground on which protest action in Niger prospers.

However, the resource curse and rentier state theories also fall short in trying to explain the political configuration of oil-age Niger. Whereas these theories would have it that oil was the cause of political disruption and violence in oil-age Niger, the fact that similar patterns of violence occurred in response to various events – the inauguration of the oil refinery, water shortages, International Workers' Day, and a film and cartoons that negatively depicted Islam – suggest that these protests can be better explained in terms of politics and socio-economic exclusion. As long as the youth in Niger (and elsewhere) continue to be economically and socio-politically largely excluded from the unequally distributed riches of capitalism in a globalized world, political decision-making processes and public debates, political machines will find henchmen for their political projects, and Islamist (or other) militant movements will find easy prey for their brutal war machines, not necessarily due to recruits' ideological commitments, but rather due to shared grievances about the West, their own national governments, and for material incentives (Köhler and Schritt 2023).

With a focus on the socio-political order of oil-age Niger, I do not, however, intend to reduce society and politics to a static socio-political system, or what Elias (2009) criticized as *Zustandsreduktion*. By showing that state and politics in Niger have changed over time, among others, Abdourahmane Idrissa (2009) criticizes the literature on African politics that derive explanations based on Weberian ideal state formulations,

and African cultural deviations from these ideal types, such as neopatrimonialism. In adopting a processual perspective throughout the book, I analyzed society not as it is, but rather “as it becomes – has become in the past, is becoming in the present, and may become in the future” (Migdal 2001:23). In adopting a processual and political economy approach to analyzing the urban riots in Niger, I have described a contemporary socio-political configuration visible at a specific moment in time. This configuration, which is contingent by its’ very nature, has been historically sedimented over time through critical events and will processually and continuously transform into new orders. However, when we look at how the protests reproduce existing patterns of domination, we come to understand the complexities and challenges in fostering deep social and political change in the new oil-age (Strønen 2017).

Extrapolating out from the mutually entangled dimensions of Niger’s contemporary socio-political configuration, the future may appear rather hopeless. However, as every major (protest) event has the potential to act as a generic moment for change, the future is contingent: *fada* that started out with charitable activities could return to their origins or build something new, the political disenchantment of youth could lead to either a complete withdrawal from processes of political mobilization or new grassroots movements, and global and/or national politics could (re)build a welfare state (in Africa) that reduces the pressures of redistribution within social networks and may then hamper the logic of political machines.

Conclusion

Inquiring into questions of oil-induced change in Niger, the starting point of this book was the oil refinery's inauguration ceremony in late 2011 and the politics that swirled around it. I asked if the inauguration event and its discontents can best be explained by resource curse dynamics or by general patterns of African politics and the state. Neither buying into the inevitability of the resource curse thesis nor into the culturalist narrative of neopatrimonialism, I opted for a practice-oriented and processual approach reconstructing the historically sedimented and fragmented socio-political order of contemporary Niger including dimensions of political and moral economy but without assuming their hegemony. In the spirit of abductive inquiry, my aim was to discover combinations of features which could not be accounted for using established theory, in this case both the resource curse thesis and neopatrimonialism. Throughout the book, I identified several problems and shortcomings with these theories research framework, providing a fresh look at the macro- and micro-political workings of an emerging oil state.

Using the extended case method, I was able to trace the moment of Niger entering oil-age into both the historical process of Niger becoming and transforming into an oil producer and the spatial connections between politics in Zinder, Diffa, and Niamey, including the international dimension of power relations. In doing so, I sought to combine two seemingly dichotomous notions, namely, that oil enters into a pre-existing political game and that new politics emerge around the issue of oil, showing that

oil politics did not emerge from a void but rather built on pre-existing foundations and constellations of the socio-political configuration. I thus argued that to answer questions about the transformations to the socio-political configuration triggered by oil, we first need to understand the configuration prior to oil. As a point of comparison, I thus first looked at pre-oil Niger's uranium production in the north of the country, which has been highly influential in the post-Independence era. This uranium-based political configuration was strongly influenced by the legacy of *Françafrique* that had shaped not only the way politics were played in postcolonial Niger, but also the ideologies and narratives that were inextricably entangled within this game. Based on these findings, I analyzed how the coming of oil was put to use in pre-existing political conflicts. Here, I showed empirically how oil had been incorporated into the logic of Niger's political game long before it had actually materialized, rather than instantly changing the game on arrival. Building on these conclusions about Nigerien macro-politics, I ethnographically analyzed the micro-politics around the inauguration in Zinder showing how the history of this marginalized region shaped oil-age politics. I then extended out of the micro-politics in Zinder to compare the contestation along the oil infrastructure in Diffa and Niamey. By looking at historical and socio-political continuities, I sought to understand how the infrastructure of oil reinforced, transformed or newly created particular collective identities in Niger. Finally, I used my findings to highlight the continuities and ruptures in the historically sedimented and fragmented socio-political order of contemporary Niger.

Relevant for anthropologists, resource scholars, and proponents of the resource curse and rentier state theory, the overall argument of the book was non-normative: for the Nigerien case, I argue that oil has neither been a blessing nor a curse so far. Rather, oil acts as a catalyst that accelerates pre-existing dynamics. Drawing together heterogeneous elements from history, political economy and culture, a new configuration with strong continuations of historical political domination emerges. The transformation process induced by oil production in Niger can thus only be understood if one thinks the monetary, symbolic, material and temporal dimensions of oil together with the social, political, economic and cultural features that pre-existed production. In other words, oil is neither the sole driver for structural change, nor is it simply incorporated into an existing socio-cultural, political and economic structure. Rather, as a catalyst, oil accelerates context-specific dynamics. With the transition to a multi-party system in the 1990s, I showed that after years of authoritarian rule in uranium-age Niger the pre-oil configuration was already characterized by political competition and public debates. And talk about oil was part of the game even before production had started. Zooming in on an ethnographic micro-perspective, I was able to specify how oil provides political players with new ideological and material resources in fueling or quelling conflicts. In other words, the case study has shown that the coming of oil accelerates, intensifies and thus transforms pre-existing socio-political configurations by providing political actors with new resources to engage in the (public) political game.

In sum, I have argued that what emerges from resource exploitation is not the one-way road to authoritarianism, corruption and war that the resource curse and rentier

state models would suggest. Without wishing to neglect the importance of financial flows or rents in maintaining the political game, as rents were indeed used by various Nigerien Presidents to purchase the loyalty of socio-political networks, the resource curse and rentier state models are simply not comprehensive and holistic enough to account for transformation processes of the whole socio-political configuration. Those studies focusing mainly on the effects of resource rents have a significant blind spot, as I have shown throughout this book. That is, they fail to take into account, or even to observe, the importance of historical transformations of socio-political configurations related to the various dimensions of resource production other than monetary revenues. One possibility to open the black box of resource curse and rentier state theories, as I have demonstrated in this book, is to account for socio-political configurations by following the historical and spatial processes of their compositions, and the particular properties they generate. I therefore propose that future research should take a holistic, multipronged approach to study the causal relationality of various dimensions of resources – rents, significations, materiality and temporality. I now turn to these sensitizing concepts each illuminating particular dynamics of oil.

Rents

Scholars drawing on the resource curse and rentier state as theoretical perspectives typically tell the history of oil and uranium in Niger in a quasi-deterministic manner. When Tandja renegotiated the uranium price with Areva/France in 2007, Servant (2008) asked if Niger was on its way to a new resource curse, arguing that the first step had already been made. In the article, Servant quickly draws a causal chain based on the rentier state model: the resource rent enables the political elite to neglect the population (here the Tuareg), which in turn take up arms to express their grievances, who are in turn further repressed by an elite which now has the financial means to do so. A similar analysis has been made by Grégoire (2010), who describes *Tazartché* as Tandja's attempt to claim the future resource rents of oil and uranium for himself and his followers. Similarly, when the Nigerien government decided to break the French monopoly on its mining sector, especially uranium, and in the ensuing 18 months allocated over 150 exploration permits to companies from around the globe, Gazibo (2011:342/343) also saw a resource curse scenario taking shape, both through an armed Tuareg insurgency that called for a fairer distribution of mining revenues and Tandja's anti-constitutional project *Tazartché* to stay in power.

However, these arguments overlook the fact that Niger has been a rentier state at least since uranium exploitation began in the early 1970s. But even before, revenues from groundnut production were used in a similar way for the cooptation of political opponents, a logic of the political game that, as I showed, has its roots in French colonialism. Moreover, Niger's dependence on "development rent", which is said to have similar effects to oil rent (Bierschenk 1988; Collier 2005; Olivier de Sardan 2013), has also increased with the influx of donor money, especially since Tandja took power in

1999. According to the resource curse and rentier state models, these rents should therefore have long led to conflict, corruption, and authoritarianism in Niger. Phrased another way, how many resource curses can hit a country? As a case study then, Niger offered the opportunity to analyze the specific socio-political effects of oil as an emerging resource, in comparison to the socio-political effects of uranium and aid that predated oil production. As such, it offered the chance to revisit the central assumption of the resource curse, that mineral resources in general, and oil in particular, foster corruption, conflict and authoritarian tendencies.

Drawing on an ethnography of political events surrounding the inauguration of Niger's first oil refinery in 2011, I argued that oil is an important, but by no means *the* determining factor in the country's current political game. While from the resource curse and rentier state perspective it seems apparent that *Tazartché* or the disorder around the refinery's inauguration were oil-induced conflicts in which different actors fought over the largest piece of the (future) resource pie, *Tazartché* was not about accessing oil rents per se, but rather a longer running political conflict. First, *Tazartché* dated back to at least 2004, when Tandja and Prime Minister Hama Amadou began fighting for control of the MNSD Nassara. Second, oil was not the root cause for the production of disorder during the oil refinery's 2011 inauguration, but rather the stage on which conflicts related to the politics of *Tazartché* were played out.

Thus, looking at the emergence of oil-age Niger from a processual perspective reveals that what resource curse theorists might view as greedy rent seeking behavior caused by oil is in fact neither new nor novel, but rather a general feature of the established political game in many African countries (and beyond). Such an analysis speaks to the academic debate on the African state. In analyzing the political game in Niger, I have shown the importance of understanding its introverted and extroverted characteristics to access external financial flows and internally (re)distributing political positions, public markets and spoils. Such an analysis questions the long standing culturalist paradigm of neo-patrimonialism in African studies that, in ascribing all ills to cultural patterns in Africa, is blind for international political economy and historical sedimentation.

Taken together, the most influential variants of the resource curse thesis explain contestation, conflict and resistance through a greed mechanism, that is, attempts to capture oil rents is considered significantly more important than political economy or cultural arguments (Collier and Hoeffler 2004).¹⁰⁵ However, I showed that oil enters into a political game that is already well-structured and which already features political conflicts between established players. Moreover, while oil provides political players with new resources, this may indeed exacerbate political and social conflicts (as the resource curse predicts), but it may equally quell conflicts (as the rentier state theory predicts) (Basedau and Lay 2009), thereby undermining any inevitability or even straightforward determinism. Instead, my case study illustrates that pre-existing patterns of domination matter (Reyna and Behrends 2011).

¹⁰⁵ For resource curse theorists who consider that there are also other possible mechanisms at work, see Humphreys (2005).

Significations

In thinking oil beyond the blessing-curse dichotomy inherent in the oil as money perspective, we have to equally account for the forms of agency and control that are produced by signifying oil in this or that way. Instead of seeking to explain political contestation solely from a rational choice perspective of greed, political contestation should be viewed comprehensively by looking at how the production of oil articulates within, and transforms, particular regimes of signification.

Tracing the development of the political conflict around *Tazartché* highlights the inextricable mixture of ideological and material exploitation in politics. Close analysis of the conflict showed that oil provided well-established political players with new financial and ideological means to achieve their political projects. In this sense, even in a state of not-yet-ness, oil acted as a catalyst, fueling, accelerating and escalating already existing political conflicts. Firstly, it becomes apparent that the opposition forces – as in the previous institutional breakdowns after the emergence of multiparty politics in Niger – formed a united democracy movement against the government when their political positions and shares of state revenues became threatened. Secondly, the monetary aspects of politics are coupled with the strategic maneuvers of signification. In this case, oil was signified either as the achievement and future task of a glorious Nigerien statesman, as Tandja's campaign had sought to represent him throughout *Tazartché*, or as a curse that transforms a democratic president into a dictator, as his opponents and political observers sought to portray him. Signifying oil in one way or the other became one of the very acts through which the struggle for state power was played out; signifying oil, loading crude with sophisticated and locally understandable meanings, became one form that political acts took in shaping Niger's political reality. Oil thus acted as an idiom in which political power struggles were framed, rather than being the sole cause or determinant of these conflicts.

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

thus means looking at cyclical processes of conversions: oil money is used to pay for signifying practices, and the meanings thereby produce new orders that define various actors' political, and consequently monetary, power.

As such, oil not only provides various political players with financial means or potential spoils, but also endows actors with a symbolic field, a repertoire of meanings within and through which the struggle for political participation or domination can be fought. By appropriating fields of oil as fields of meanings, political players acquire a new language through which they can appeal to supporters, attack opponents, make claims, and legitimize a particular course of action. In a setting of political competition since the enactment of a multi-party system in the 1990s, oil was being politically exploited by powerful strategic groups in the speech acts of naming, blaming and claiming even before the first barrel had been extracted. I have shown how these actors used oil in political discourse to question the legitimacy of political opponents and to formulate political claims. In contrast, women, farmers and the subaltern more generally were effectively locked out of the political game because they had hardly access to talking on the radio. Subaltern youth were able to gain a small foothold, but only through the performance of violence and through new media formats with limited barriers to entry like talk-back radio, and through avenues outside the official news media – texting, rumor and gossip. Thus, oil talk not only helps shape Niger's social and political realities but also reconstructs social and political differences and reinforces established patterns of domination.

Taken together, this case study vividly demonstrates that to make predictions about the socio-political effects of oil, context is essential: the pre-existing political conflicts in which oil production emerges and in which it is incorporated have to be thoroughly examined in each, individual case. As long as it is not looted as a material resource, oil is primarily at the disposal of the incumbent government in a number of rent forms: taxes, royalty payments, revenue from sales on the world market, contract signing bonuses, sales of refined products, and so on.¹⁰⁶ The government in power may use the revenue to buy political loyalty and thus stabilize the regime. As an ideological resource, oil is essentially at the disposal of all political actors, depending on the degree of the freedoms of speech, press and associational life in the country, and access to the public. In a semi-presidential multiparty system and electoral democracy like Niger, the significations of oil thus become an important instrument of power, adopted by political actors both to legitimize and delegitimize positions within existing power structures. Oil may be a curse, but it is not inevitably so – oil is not simply a “one-way street”. Rather, oil should be seen as a catalyst which typically accelerates, but may also quell, pre-existing tensions and dynamics. Research on oil-induced socio-political dynamics should therefore pursue a symmetrical analysis of both the material and the ideological aspects of oil production, considering both equally, and taking their mutual translation processes into account.

¹⁰⁶ On numerous occasions, pipelines in Nigeria have been cut open to extract the oil and to sell it on the black market.

Materiality

Taking up emerging research on the materiality and infrastructure of oil, I explored the disputes that emerged along the oil infrastructure (Barry 2013). An analysis of political disputes along the oil infrastructure required multi-sited research to trace the forces, relations and flows of knowledge between different sites. As such, to analyze the forms of contestation that emerged out of the materialization of the infrastructure of oil in Niger, I conducted research at its three sites: extraction (Diffa), refinement (Zinder), and governance/consumption (Niamey). Reading the Nigerien case study through a lens of materiality, we come to see how the infrastructure of oil became integral to political disputes. Comparing political disputes along the infrastructure of oil in Niger, we can speak of the emergence of “infrastructural publics” (Collier, Mizes, and Schnitzler 2016). Collier, Mizes and von Schnitzler argue that infrastructures call publics into being by affecting a particular set of actors into political action who then become “involved in contesting and making (differential) claims on the state”. From this point of view, the implementation of the infrastructure of oil in Niger – the oil wells, the pipeline, the refinery, tanker trucks, taxis, and petrol stations – called (counter)publics into being by affecting a particular set of actors and actor groups.

However, in his book *Material Politics*, Barry also directs us to study oil from a perspective that attends “at once to the specificity of materials, to the contingencies of physical geography, the tendencies of history and the force of political action” (2013:183). Similarly, the concept of “resource materialities” (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014) forces us to look not only at the physical substance of oil, but beyond it to its distributions within larger configurations that include infrastructures, epistemologies and politics. Thus, instead of the publics around the oil infrastructure emerging from a void, we equally need to “attend to the historically and geographically contingent ways in which diverse events and materials come to be matters of public dispute” (Barry 2013:8). In this sense, I showed not only the societal pre-conditions in how publics form and swirl around infrastructures of oil but also focused on how pre-existing socio-political configurations are transformed within and through the public disputes.

I demonstrated for the particular case of Niger that the spatial dispersion of the oil infrastructure produced territorialized claims around the three different but interconnected sites: the site of oil extraction, the site of oil refinement, and the site of oil’s political power and consumption. Each region’s claims were based on varied understandings of resource ownership, and on the (anticipated) positive and negative effects of oil production. These claims were triggered by the Tandja government’s strategic political decision in 2008 to construct the refinery in the Zinder region, 400 km west of the extraction sites in Diffa, and about 1000 km east of Niamey. Whereas the push for fuel price subsidies in Niger’s capital for the whole Nigerien population to benefit from the oil can be characterized as “oil nationalism”, at the sites of extraction and refinement, social and political actors claim regional marginalization by relating the new

oil reality to historical narratives of repression, resistance, and rebellion. These regions call for particular regional benefits such as compensation for environmental pollution, a share of profits, or a lower regional fuel price. In triggering (counter)publics, the infrastructure of oil thus stitched together several otherwise spatially and temporally separated narratives of historical marginalization. In other words, the construction of Niger's oil infrastructure spurred a process I call "territorialization" by reconfiguring the relations of territory, identity and rule inherent in "governable spaces" (Watts 2004). As Watts showed for Nigeria as well, oil restructured the established configurations of power in dynamic ways that were often articulated in ethno-regional terms.

In other words, as a material-semiotic practice of interpreting and creating the infrastructure (of oil), "infrastructuring" oil interweaves economic, political, legal and socio-cultural orderings with ethics, morals, technologies, affects, and imaginations, and thereby reconfigures pre-existing configurations in new and unpredictable ways (Calkins and Rottenburg 2017:254). One of these (un)intended effects in Niger is the (re)iteration of collective identities along the oil infrastructure: ethno-regional marginalization in Zinder, oil autochthony in Diffa, and nationality and citizenship in Niamey. These collective identities were not only related to histories of marginalization, but also more broadly to particular administrative spaces, revenue laws, decentralization politics, the distribution of the oil rent, and the material effects of oil in terms of job opportunities or environmental hazards. In this sense, "the political significance of materials is not given; rather, it is a relational, a practical and a contingent achievement" (Barry 2013:183). The infrastructure of oil forms part of a dynamic socio-political configuration which produces unintended and unexpected effects. The infrastructural publics in Niger could not be reduced to conflicts over the distribution of the oil rent, as rentier state and resource curse perspectives would have it. Rather, the infrastructure of oil not only entered particular regimes of governance and significations, but also (re)produced and transformed them.

Temporality

As I have sketched in the introduction, temporality points to how resources frame the past, present and future in different phases of oil development – from its emergence to its decline. Oil's material effects are thus talked about differently in the various moments of its production (to read about how wind is talked about in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec see (Howe and Boyer 2015).

Comparing the case of Niger with oil politics in neighboring countries, and referring to other ethnographic studies of oil production, we see how oil is talked about differently in the various moments of its production. In other words, significations of oil differ in their temporal dimensions, depending on the "phases of oil development" (Heilbrunn 2014:110–144). I see five broad phases of oil production to be of particular importance. First, the phase of not-yet-ness, when the government, and at least parts of the population are aware that oil exploration has begun, but production

has not yet started. Weszkalnys (2011, 2014, 2016) in São Tomé and Príncipe, Witte (2017) in Uganda and Behrends (2008) in Chad have analyzed how the absence or not-yet-ness of oil production spurred all kinds of anticipatory practices and economies of expectation, and thus materialized and affected the country, although the oil still remained in the ground. Second, the phase as an emergent oil producer, where oil production is just about to or has just commenced. I showed that Niger in 2011–2012 was characterized by oil's immediate presence, with oil acting as an idiom that framed political conflicts. However, as I showed with recurrent protests around various events in Niger, after several month or years of production, oil's discursive presence has diminished over time, and political debates have increasingly turned toward other issues. Third, the phase of a mature oil producer like Nigeria, where production started decades ago, and patterns to manage and absorb oil revenues have become well-established. In this advanced stage of production, oil seems to have lost its early significance in public discourse. Nevertheless, oil continues to profoundly shape the very form of political configurations, as it does in Nigeria (Watts 2004), where it has trickled down into everyday life, becoming expressed in all kinds of illicit behavior (Apter 2005). Fourth, the phase of declining production, as in Gabon or Oman, where hydrocarbons decrease and oil revenues start to fall. In this late stage of production, oil appears to again become discursively pertinent, with a (perceived) end to production looming. In Oman, for example, this has spurred new discussions about a future without oil (Limbert 2010), and in Gabon, the continuous depletion of oil has produced new uncertainties among the population (Fricke 2017). Fifth, we can imagine a post-oil phase where production has ceased, and where oil might be (actively) remembered or forgotten. However, we should not conceptualize these phases too neatly, or as self-contained. In the uranium case of Niger, for example, we see how uranium periodically became an issue, decades after production had started and configurations of power were established. In other words, oil (and other resources) can still be granted discursive power by political maneuvers, especially in relation to broader international events, such as a price boom or crash.

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Appendix

Figures

Figure 0.1:	The secured VIP area in front of the stage.....	18
Figure 0.2:	Oil production in Niger	22
Figure 4.1:	Inside the courtyard on the day of Dan Dubai's trial.....	102
Figure 4.2:	Destroyed traffic lights and burning tires at a major junction in Zinder.....	105
Figure 4.3:	Burned-down police station at the main market.....	106
Figure 4.4:	Burned-down ECOBANK at the Total roundabout in Zinder	108
Figure 5.1:	The oil infrastructure in Niger.....	116
Figure 6.1:	Protests and Riots in Niger	134

Table on History of Oil Companies in Niger

Year	Company	Operations	Announced Results	Region
1958–1960	Cipao (operator Mobil West Africa)	First surveys (geological overview)	Area classified unfavorable	Iullemmeden Basin
1960–1964	Petropar	Exploration; 9 oil wells (4 in Djado and 5 in Talak)	Oil wells were dry	Djado and Talak
1962	Sapphire International Petroleum (Iranian)	Demanded permit for 150,000 km ²	Permit denied (due to financial situation)	South-East
1970–1980	Bishop Oil and Refining (from Petropar)	No real activities	No results stated	Djado and Talak
1970–1976	Conoco (Shell owned 50% since 1971)	Airmag 200,000km ² , 1687 km of seismic data; one (1) oil well	Dry	Niger SUD
1970–1979	Global (Operator: Texaco (1973–77); Esso (1977–80))	Exploration permit, drilled 2 wells	Both dry	Seguedine
1970–1979	Global (Operator Sun Oil 1971–76)	Exploration permit, drilled 1 well	Dry	Dosso
1969–1977	Texaco (Esso enters in 1974)	Exploration permit, drilled 2 wells	1 dry, 1 hints of oil (1975 Madama/Tin-Touma)	Agadem
1977–1980	Texaco and Esso (Esso hold 51%)	Exploration permit, drilled 6 wells	4 dry, 1 hints (Yougou1), 1 faint hints (Yougou2)	Agadem
1978–1983	Elf Aquitaine (SNEA)	3 exploration permits	No information	Niger occidental
1981		drilled 4 wells	2 dry, 2 positive (Sokor 1, Sokor 2)	Manga, Bilma Agadem
1977– 1981	Oxoco-Arraca	No real activities	No information	Dibella
1985/ 1990–1995	Elf and Esso	No information New license; 5 wells	No information 4 wells positive	Agadem

Year	Company	Operations	Announced Results	Region
1992	Hunt Oil	Exploration permit	No information	Djado
1997/98	Esso and Elf	3 new wells	No information	Agadem
1998	Esso	Took all permits from Elf	No information	Agadem
1997–2003	TG World Energy	Withdrawal of permit	No field operations	Ténéré
2000	Hunt Oil	Drilling	No information	Djado
2002–2006	Esso and Petronas (operator)	3 wells; abandoned Agadem in 2006, judging it economically not profitable	Estimated reserves: 324 million barrels of oil and 10 billion m ³ of gas	Agadem
Since 2004 (November 2003)	CNPC (TG World Energy holds 20%)	No information	Oil found at Oyou-1	Ténéré and Bilma
Since 2005	Sonatrach	No information	No information	Kafra
Since 2008	CNPC-NP (Production Sharing Contract; joint venture refinery and pipeline)	124 exploration wells with 93 discoveries (a 75% success rate)	Estimated reserves more than 975 million barrels of oil (2P reserve base) and more than 16 billion m ³ gas	Agadem
2012–2016	Labana Petroleum (Nigeria)	2 blocks	Not yet	Dibella I and Dallol
2012–2016	International Petroleum (Australia)	4 blocks	Not yet	Manga1, Manga2, Aborak, Ténéré West
2012–2016	Genmin (Bermuda)	1 block	Not yet	Djado I
2012–2016	Sirius Energy (Nigeria)	1 block	Not yet	Grein
2012–2016	Advantica (Nigeria)	1 block	Not yet	Mandara M2
Since 2014	Savannah Petroleum	4 blocks in Agadem	Identified 118 exploration targets with prospected recoverable resources at 2.185 billion barrels of oil	Agadem, R1, R2, R3, R4

Acronyms

3N.....	Nigériens Nourrissent les Nigériens
ADINI.....	Association pour la Diffusion de l'Islam au Niger
AEC.....	Alternative Espaces Citoyens
AIDS.....	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AMACA.....	Association Mutuelle pour la Culture et les Arts
ANDP	Alliance Nigérienne pour la Démocratie et le Progrès-Zaman Lahiya
ANPE	Association Nationale des Parents d'Élèves
ARN.....	Alliance pour la Réconciliation Nationale
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CASARIF.....	Comité d'Appui aux Services d'Assiette et de Recouvrement des taxes et Impôts Fonciers
CCN.....	Conseil Consultatif National
CDS	Convention Démocratique et Sociale-Rahama
CDSCN.....	Coalition Démocratique de la Société Civile Nigérienne
CEA.....	Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique
CENI.....	Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante
CFA.....	Colonies Françaises d'Afrique
CFDR.....	Coordination des Forces pour la Démocratie et la République
CIN.....	Conseil Islamique du Niger
CNPC.....	China National Petroleum Corporation
CODDAE	Collectif pour la Défense du Droit à l'Énergie
CODDHD.....	Collectif des Organisations de Défense des Droits de l'Homme et de la Démocratie
COGEMA.....	Compagnie Générale des Matières Nucléaire
COGES	Comité de Gestion Scolaire
COMINAK	Compagnie Minière d'Akouta
CRAS	Comité Régional des Associations et Syndicats de la Région de Zinder
CROISADE.....	Comité de Réflexion et d'Orientation Indépendant pour la Sauvegarde des Acquis Démocratiques
CSRD	Conseil Suprême pour la Restauration de la Démocratie
CSSTN	Collectif des Syndicats du Secteur des Transports du Niger
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
FARS	Forces Armées Révolutionnaires du Sahara
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GREN	Groupe de Réflexion et d'Action sur les industries Extractives
GTZ.....	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HALCIA.....	Haute Autorité de Lutte Contre la Corruption

INS.....	Institut National de la Statistique
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MEBA.....	Ministère de l'Éducation de Base et de l'Alphabétisation
MFPPJ	Mouvement de Fada et Palais pour la Promotion des Jeunes
MNJ.....	Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice
MNRD.....	Mouvement Nigérien pour le Renouveau Démocratique – Hankuri
MNSD.....	Mouvement National de la Société de Développement-Nassara
MODEN-FA	Mouvement Démocratique Nigérien pour une Fédération Africaine-Lumana
MPCR.....	Mouvement pour la Promotion de la Citoyenneté Responsable
MPDNP	Mouvement Patriotique pour la Défense de la Nation et du Peuple
MPPAD	Mouvement Populaire pour la Pérennisation des Actions du Développement
NGO.....	Non-Governmental Organization
NIGELEC	Société Nigérienne d'Electricité
OCRS.....	Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes
OFID	OPEC Fund for International Development
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
ORTN	Office du Radiodiffusion Télévision du Niger
OSC Manga.....	Collectif des Cadres et Représentants des Organisations de la Société Civile du Manga
OURD.....	Overseas Uranium Resources Development
PAC	Parents, Amis et Connaissances
PETROPAR	Petróleos Paraguayos
PCF.....	Parti Communiste Français
PNDS	Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme-Tarayya
PPN	Parti Progressiste Nigérien
PWYP	Publish What You Pay
RCI.....	Radio China International
RFI.....	Radio France International
ROTAB.....	Réseau des Organisations pour la Transparence et l'Analyse Budgétaire
RTT	Radio Télévision Ténéré
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programs
SEEN	Société d'Exploitation des Eaux du Niger
SIM	Subscriber Identification Module
SNEN	Syndicat National des Enseignants du Niger
SMS	Short Message Service
SNCRN	Syndicat National des Conducteurs Routiers du Niger
SNTHN	Syndicat des Transporteurs d'Hydrocarbures du Niger
SONIDEP	Société Nigérienne des Produits Pétroliers
SOMAIR.....	Société des Mines de l'Air

SORAZ	Société de Raffinage de Zinder
STMN	Syndicat des Transporteurs Marchandises du Niger
SYNCOTAXI ...	Syndicat des Conducteurs de Taxi
SYNCIBUS	Syndicat des conducteurs de minibus
UDN.....	Union Démocratique Nigérienne
UDSR.....	Union Démocratique et Sociale de la Résistance
UNIS	Union Nigérienne des Indépendants et Sympathisants
UNTN.....	Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Niger
USD	United States Dollar
USN.....	Union des Scolaires Nigériens
USTN	Union des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Niger
VAT.....	Value-Added Tax
VIP	Very Important Person
VOA.....	Voice of America
WWI.....	World War I
WWII.....	World War II
XOF	West African CFA franc

Hausa Terms

<i>dan Dubai</i>	son of Dubai
<i>dan ubanci</i>	conflicts, rivalry, disputes and disunity
<i>faba faba</i>	minibuses
<i>fada</i>	conversation groups
<i>kabou kabou</i>	motorcycle taxis
<i>kouran daga</i>	the fighting hyena
<i>kubli</i>	wife seclusion
<i>palais</i>	youth gangs
<i>shugaba</i>	boss
<i>tazarce</i>	continuation, continuity or prolongation
<i>zaki</i>	lion

In 2011, Niger became a new oil producer. Based on an extended case study of the country's entry into the oil-age, the book offers a nuanced examination of the local, regional, national and international dynamics that have shaped Niger's contemporary socio-political configuration. The analysis of the political order in the oil era helps to situate recent developments, such as the military coup of 16 July 2023, within the broader historical continuities and political logics that characterise the country. While the coup has fuelled speculation about possible alliances and motivations linked to the country's anticipated oil boom, it must be situated within a complex web of political, economic and social dynamics that this book carefully dissects. "Crude Moves" provides a much-needed political anthropology of contemporary Nigerien politics and society, avoiding analyses that overemphasise either oil (the 'resource curse' literature) or 'African' traditional culture (the 'neo-patrimonialism' literature) as the determining factors in the political game. Instead, it analyses how a socio-political configuration has historically emerged over time through introverted and extroverted dynamics.

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