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COLONIAL TRANSATLANTIQUES: THE FRENCH LINE IN ALGERIA, 1880-1940

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France's largest and most prestigious company, the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique—known colloquially as the French Line—is best-known for its North Atlantic ocean liners. However, after 1880, it added the Mediterranean to its sphere of operations connecting Marseille with Algeria—the jewel in the crown of the French empire. The French Line's move into colonial waters at first glance seems a strange move given its sphere of operations on the North Atlantic. However, the company founders, the Pereire brothers, and succeeding presidents that hailed from Marseille were deeply interested in Algeria as a market from the company's founding and it formed a significant sphere of operations within the French Line and an important institution of colonial Algeria. This article brings to light the hidden colonial history of the French Line and its experience as a servant and shaper of empire.

In 1880, the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique (known in English as the French Line) – the largest shipping company in France—expanded its sphere of operations from the Atlantic and Caribbean into the Western Mediterranean. From its main Mediterranean port of Marseille, the French Line began operating regular services to Algeria—the “jewel in the crown” of the French empire and just an overnight voyage from France. Unique among France's colonies, Algeria had a European settler population (henceforth Euro-Algerians) that enjoyed French citizenship, political representation in the French Parliament in Paris, and after 1898 a semi-autonomous legislative body called the Financial Delegations that oversaw the colony's budget. The company's move into Mediterranean waters came as somewhat of a shock to the Marseille shipping world, however. First of all, the company's home port was located in the Norman city of Le Havre, and its headquarters were in Paris. Second, the outsider company managed to obtain a Post Office mail contract for Algeria by

undercutting Marseille-based shipping firms. From these audacious beginnings, the French Line's Mediterranean network became a significant sphere of operations for the company from the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. As one of France's most powerful companies and in many ways an ambassador of France to the maritime world, the French Line's move into the Mediterranean made it a significant economic institution within the heart of France's empire as well.

Ship aficionados are more likely to be familiar with the French Line as a prestigious North Atlantic shipping line which linked Le Havre and New York from 1864 to 1974 with such monuments to naval architecture with liners like the *France* of 1912, the *Ile-de-France* of 1927, and the *Normandie* of 1935. Each ship enjoyed enviable reputations of excellent service, superlative cuisine, and stylish décor. On the North Atlantic the French Line competed with the British Cunard and White Star Lines and German Norddeutscher Lloyd and HAPAG companies in the fierce contest to build the largest, fastest, and most luxurious ships. The French Line became an ambassador for France to the world. Its advertisements from the 1920s proudly boasted that boarding one of its ships meant the passenger was already in France on the "world's longest gangplank."¹ More humorously, the French Line boasted in print that "more seagulls followed the French liners than any other because the scraps were better!"²

However, the French Line ran services to French colonies in the Caribbean and North Africa. The ships on these networks were cut from humbler cloth, designed for the export of colonial products to France, carrying the mail for colonial administration, and the transport of government functionaries. The ships constructed for North African services provided a stark contrast to the company's transatlantic giants; of modest size, comfortably (though not excessively) appointed, and designed for short, frequent overnight trans-Mediterranean voyages rather than the week-long transatlantic crossing. Where the company's advertisements likened its transatlantic liners to floating hotels and

¹ Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail (hereafter ANMT) 9 AQ 231, New York Herald, June 1925.

² William Miller (1997, 63).

unending parties, its Mediterranean liners resembled, both in operations and ships used, the frequent cross-Channel steamers between Britain and France.

Despite the name *Compagnie Générale Transatlantique*, the French Line followed a similar pattern to other shipping companies who owed their existence to imperialism—the French company *Messageries Maritimes* for Indochina, the British *Peninsular & Oriental (P&O)* for India and Australia and *Union-Castle Line* to South Africa. As Michael Miller (2012, 72-73) observes, steamship companies expanded with imperial rule by routinizing communication between colony and mother country. The French Line first served Mexico in 1862, coinciding with Napoleon III's imperial ambitions in Central America, but also serving France's Caribbean colonies (Marthe Barbance 1955, 61-62). After expanding into Marseille, the French Line inherited and developed a coastal shipping network that bound Algeria and Tunisia to France. Scholars such as Miller note the importance of coastal shipping for connecting global chains of traffic. Shipping companies in this period operated in one or two ocean zones, making global shipping a fragmented whole. Joseph à Campo (1996) speaks to the importance of the KPM (*Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij*) company in linking the coastal trades of colonial Indonesia to the long-distance lines to the Netherlands via Batavia.³ J. Forbes Munro (2003, 35-67, 72-80) examines the foundation of William McKinnon's shipping empire in the Indian Ocean, starting with the BI (*British Indian Steam Navigation Company*), which operated coastal shipping routes in India, and NISM (*Nederlandsch Indische Stoovaart Maatschappij*) in the Java Sea of colonial Indonesia. Additionally, John MacKenzie (2004, 127) points out maritime studies tend to favor large-scale networks, companies, and ships, but focusing on coastal trade reveals the larger complexity of shipping and the impact of imperial shipping in both large and small bodies of water. While the French Line's Mediterranean operations shared characteristics with coastal shipping in its small geographic scope, its Mediterranean liners are best likened to miniature “flagships of imperialism,” to borrow Freda Harcourt's (2006) phrase for the P&O company. The importance of

³ See also Miller (2012) pages 81-88 and 148.

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ensuring regular communications with Algeria, considered a French province, made the network as important as the P&O's services to India or Messageries Maritimes' to Indochina.

Of the company's three networks, the Mediterranean was the smallest both geographically and in revenue produced. Net revenues for each network taken from published shareholders reports between 1881 and 1932 show that over the course of this time, the North Atlantic accounted for 49 percent of revenues, the Mediterranean 21 percent, and the Caribbean 30 percent.⁴ Yet the net revenues of both the Mediterranean and Caribbean networks combined show that colonial markets accounted for over half of the French Line's income and demonstrate the importance of colonies to the company's bottom line. The relationship between empire and shipping was particularly strong in France because over the course of the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries colonies became increasingly important markets for French shipping lines unable to compete globally. Marie-Françoise Berneron-Couvenhes' work on Messageries Maritimes shows the company's reliance on French colonial markets, in particular Indochina (2007b, 683), while Antoine Frémont (1998, 61-62) demonstrates the French Line's dependence on its colonial networks for its financial health. France's two preeminent shipping companies relied on colonial markets unlike Mackinnon's BI and later NISM networks, where he operated comfortably in imperial waters, but also in Indonesia. Despite the links between imperialism and the growth of British shipping, Munro estimates that only one third of the British merchant fleet engaged directly in colonial trades (2003, 486-487).

A centenary history of the French Line published in 1955 underlines the contrast between the French Line's two faces, spending much more time on the company's constant struggle to surpass its international rivals than its Caribbean or Mediterranean networks. In contrast, the book summarized the French Line's role in colonial Algeria as a distinctive network from the Atlantic, one where the company contributed greatly to the colony's *mise en valeur*, enjoyed an overwhelming commercial

⁴ Compiled from annual shareholders' reports (assemblées générales) in the Marseille Chamber of Commerce archives (CCM MR 4.4.6.1.1/03, MR 4.4.6.1.1/04, and MR 4.4.6.1.1/05) and the Archives Nationales du Monde de Travail in Roubaix (ANMT 9 AQ 11 and 9 AQ 12 and 65 AQ Q 146/2).

preeminence due to protectionist legislation, but also a difficult sphere of operation. Rival ports on both sides of the Mediterranean demanded to be included in the French Line's network, Euro-Algerians incessantly demanded more voyages and faster speeds, and the French government insisted that it serve ports of little commercial value to the French Line for the greater imperial good (Barbance 1955, 101).

In this paper, I argue that though the French Line's Mediterranean network was often overlooked, it was also an important network to the company, both for economic reasons and the personalities of its directors. This paper acts as a case study of the French Line's distinctive Mediterranean network to make a contribution to the growing literature of shipping and empire that places large and small-scale networks in dialogue with each other. Based upon research in surviving French Line archives, scattered throughout France and Algeria, this study places the French Line's Mediterranean network within the company's larger sphere of operations. Its distinctiveness from the other networks is noteworthy, too. As shipping provided the only means of mass transportation for the nineteenth century and remained so until the 1930s, Algeria's maritime links with France were of the utmost importance to the colony's Euro-Algerian population who considered the colony to be an integral part of France merely separated by a body of water. The political sway of Euro-Algerian institutions and political voice in France had the potential to lessen the French Line's range of actions in its Mediterranean network. As the French Line proudly proclaimed itself an ambassador for France to the world at large, it could also be humbled and frustrated by colonial politics, too.

The Colonial Face of the French Line

Although the French Line was founded in 1861 to assure transatlantic services between Le Havre, New York, and Central America, the Mediterranean and Algeria figured prominently among its founders, brothers Emile (1800-1875) and Isaac (1806-1880) Pereire. The Pereire brothers, Sephardic Jews from Bordeaux, made their fortune with the *Crédit Mobilier* bank which financed their real estate ventures and railway construction before expanding into shipping. They figured prominently among the financial magnates of nineteenth-century France and rivaled the

Rothschilds. When the Pereire brothers moved to Paris in the 1820s, they became associated with Saint-Simonianism. This movement, led by Claude-Henri de Rouvroy, the comte de Saint-Simon, theorized about a peaceful, industrialized society where science and industry would create a “universal association” between all segments of society. The Saint-Simonian movement attracted many students from the Ecole Polytechnique and young Romantics, a milieu in which the Pereire brothers socialized. Following Saint-Simon’s death in 1825, Prosper Enfantin continued the Saint-Simonian movement and its followers became influential administrators and business magnates in mid-nineteenth century France (Helen Davies 2015, 42-43).

One of the most influential Saint-Simonians was Michel Chevalier, who gave Saint-Simonianism a geographic scope in his 1832 publication *Système de la Méditerranée*, which coincided with renewed French interest in the Mediterranean after the conquest of Algeria in 1830. In Chevalier’s work, he theorized that the transformative powers of steamships and railways would extend “universal association” across the Mediterranean, turning the sea into the “nuptial bed of the Orient and the Occident” (Michel Chevalier 1832, 34-38). The Pereires, also associates with Chevalier, took interest in his “Mediterranean System” and the new colony of Algeria’s place within it. As early as 1833, Emile Pereire wrote about the potential for steamships and railroads in spreading “universal association” to Algeria in the Saint-Simonian publication *Le National*. Emile wrote of the necessity of creating a railway system in Algeria with good shipping connections to Marseille, optimistically noting that “in [Algeria], everything is to be made” (Hippolyte Castille 1861, 28-33).⁵

As the Pereire brothers made their fortunes in banking, real estate, and railways, they expanded into shipping in 1855 when they founded the Compagnie Générale Maritime (CGM), the predecessor to the French Line. The CGM engaged primarily in transatlantic trade between Europe, and North and Central America, but also established a Rouen–Algeria service and began negotiations with Marseille merchants to expand the CGM into the Mediterranean. Unlike their previous successes, the CGM proved to be a financial failure due to the Pereire brothers’ naïveté about

⁵ Also see Davies (2015, 73); Paul Bois (1996, 9).

shipping economics and substantial foreign competition. They decided to seek government support to save their shipping company by obtaining a mail contract in 1861 that subsidized services between Le Havre and New York and Saint-Nazaire and the Caribbean (Davies 2015, 125-127, 198-201).⁶ The reorganized company changed its name to the more appropriate Compagnie Générale Transatlantique and dropped its unprofitable Mediterranean services, too.

Though the French Line exited the Mediterranean after its 1861 reorganization, this departure would prove temporary. The Pereires continued to look for business opportunities in the Mediterranean, investing in railways in Spain, connecting their Bordeaux-based Midi Railway to the Mediterranean port of Sète (though they were blocked from expanding into Marseille by Talobot's Rothschild-supported Paris-Lyon-Mediterranean railway), and investing in real estate in Marseille. In North Africa, the Pereires also financed the Bône-Guelma railway in eastern Algeria as well as the Société des Batignolles (Davies 2015, 207-210; Barbance 1955, 103; François Caron 2005, 51). Eugène Pereire (1831-1908), Isaac's son, followed in his father's and uncle's footsteps and directed the French Line from 1875 until 1904. He successfully tendered for the Algeria mail contract in 1880 and the French Line became an established presence in the Mediterranean. In the 1889 World's Fair, Eugène Pereire sponsored a pavilion titled "Panorama Transatlantique" showcasing the French Line's economic role for France and its colonial role in North Africa. He commissioned two paintings of the company's Mediterranean liners and the accompanying text encouraged visitors to view Algiers as the capital of "New France."⁷ Until 1904, the French Line was the creation and under the control of the Saint-Simonian Pereire family; the movement helps explain their Mediterranean ambitions in the face of the company's more well-known transatlantic network. After 1904,

⁶ Archives de l'Association French Lines (Hereafter AFL) 1999 004 0993, Claude Rey "Les origines de la Compagnie Générale Transatlantique à Marseille," 112.

⁷ Wolfsonian-FIU Library 83.2.2243, Jules Richard, *Le Panorama de la Compagnie Générale Transatlantique* (Paris: Librairie des Imprimeries Réunies, 1889), 44.

the Pereire influence disappeared, but the French Line's following Presidents, Jules Charles-Roux (1841-1918) and John Dal Piaz (1865-1928), continued to devote the company's attention to the Mediterranean.

In 1904, the French Line Board invited Jules Charles-Roux to be the company's new President, where he served until his death in 1918. Born into a wealthy merchant family in Marseille, Charles-Roux enjoyed careers in business and government (he was a deputy to the National Assembly from 1889 to 1898) before coming to the French Line. While working for the Marseille Chamber of Commerce, he traveled to Egypt to report on the construction of the Suez Canal, becoming friends with Ferdinand de Lesseps. As deputy in Parliament, he rubbed shoulders with other colonialists, and took active interest in the French merchant marine. He organized the 1906 Colonial Exposition in Marseille. After leaving government, he became president of the Fraissinet shipping company in 1900. Once in the French Line, Charles-Roux reorganized and reinvigorated the company, taking special interest in its North African network and selling himself as a self-proclaimed "colonial" (Isabelle Aillaud et al, 2004). Following Charles-Roux's death in 1918, John Dal Piaz (1865-1928) became president of the French Line in 1920. In 1888, he began working as Eugène Pereire's secretary and became general secretary in the early twentieth century. He rose rapidly through the company ranks, becoming in many ways Jules Charles-Roux's right-hand man. As President of the French Line during the 1920s, he saw the development of North African tourism, starting with automobile tours of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia and eventually founding a hotel chain (*Société des Voyages et Hôtels Nord-Africains*, or SVHNA) in 1925. Dal Piaz also expanded the French Line's operations into nascent airline services between France and North Africa by purchasing shares in the *Compagnie aérienne France-Algérie* in 1923.⁸ Shortly before his death in 1928, Dal Piaz proclaimed "North Africa... is the extension of France, not

⁸ Barbance (1955, 142, 191, 230, 242); Bois (1996, 138-139); also see CCM 4.4.6.1.1/01, René Laurent, "Les services maritimes et aériens de la C^{ie} G^{le} Transatlantique et de ses filiales entre la France et l'Afrique du Nord. Description résumée depuis le début (1880)," n.d., 26-34.

‘France overseas’ as there are hardly any barriers [between the two halves of France].”⁹

These brief biographical sketches of the Pereires, as well as Charles-Roux and Dal Piaz, demonstrate a clear business and geographic link between the French Line and the Mediterranean that was not immediately evident in the name *Compagnie Générale Transatlantique*. An even more direct link with the leaders of the French Line and the Mediterranean was the fact that ships serving North Africa bore the name of these presidents, something not seen on its other networks. When the French Line expanded into the Mediterranean in 1880, it constructed a fleet of thirteen *Moïse*-class ships in British shipyards for the new services. One of the ships was named the *Isaac Pereire* in tribute to the recent death of one of the French Line’s founders (Bois 1996, 372). In 1888, a new fleet of ships was designed for rapid Algiers-Marseille services, one of which was named the *Eugène Pereire* – the first ship to make a 24-hour crossing across the Mediterranean (Bois 1996, 381-382). Under the Presidency of Jules Charles-Roux, the company began experimenting with new turbine propulsion technology for its ships. The results of these experiments included the Mediterranean liner *Charles-Roux* of 1909, the first turbine-powered vessel in the French merchant marine, and the company’s test of its turbine Atlantic liner *France* of 1912 (Bois 1996, 387-388; Barbance 1955, 152). After the death of Dal Piaz in 1928, the French Line named a Mediterranean liner the *Président Dal Piaz* in tribute to the man who helped develop Algeria’s tourism industry with his hotel chain and automobile tours (Bois 1996, 399-400).

Beyond the unique tradition of the French Line naming its ships after company presidents, the company’s Algerian network also proved distinctive in its operations. The French Line’s Mediterranean network remained geographically small compared to its North Atlantic and Caribbean ones, with the distance between Marseille and Algiers a little over 400 miles. The geographic scale could be deceiving, however. As the French Line’s passenger service was concentrated into a single Le Havre-New York trunk route, it was dispersed among many ports in the

⁹ ANMT 9 AQ 240, “L’Afrique du Nord, dit M. Dal Piaz, est le prolongement de notre France,” in *Journal du Maroc*, 16 March 1928.

Mediterranean. From Marseille, the French Line's principle North African routes were Marseille-Algiers, Marseille-Oran, and Marseille-Tunis, but it operated itineraries from other French ports such as Sète and Port-Vendres to the less populated cities of Bône and Philippeville as well as coastal services in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. In 1910, the company used five ships for its Le Havre-New York service and each ship traveled an average of 22,096.53 leagues per year. In contrast, the company employed 17 ships for its Algerian and Tunisian services, each traveling on average 12,295.45 leagues.¹⁰ The fact that a Mediterranean liner traveled 55 percent the total annual distance of a transatlantic one demonstrates the intensity of operations for an individual ship. Given the difference between the total number of ships between the Atlantic (5) and Mediterranean (17), cumulatively, the French Line's compact Mediterranean network amounted to a greater total annual distance than its Atlantic one, 260,000 leagues compared to 110,000. The traffic carried by the French Line's Mediterranean services consisted of government functionaries, tourists, Algerian migrant workers, and perishable goods. These highly seasonal trades meant that French Line designed its Mediterranean ships to accommodate multiple functions specific to each trade within their modest hulls.¹¹ Where the French Line viewed itself as an ambassador of France to the world, its presence in North Africa tied it to colonial politics and Euro-Algerian settler dynamics of Algeria, one where the powerful French Line could be humbled by vociferous colonial critics.

Mail Contracts, Marseille, and Algeria, 1830-1880

When the French Line first entered the Mediterranean in 1880, there had been nearly half a century of regular steamship communications with Algeria. Steamships were a new technology in 1830 when the French first conquered Algiers. Of an invasion fleet of 645 ships, seven steamships belonging to the navy ferried orders between ships, bombarded the coastline, and sent word to Toulon of the French victory in Algiers. Given

¹⁰ Archives Nationales de France, site Pierrefitte-sur-Seine (Hereafter AN) F 12 7463, "Tableau des services maritimes postaux subventionnés sur le budget des postes et des télégraphes au 31 décembre 1910."

¹¹ Bois (1996, 45-46, 59).

the immense number of troops and materiel in Algeria, establishing regular communications became essential to assure military control of the new colony. Steamships offered punctual, reliable schedules and a faster crossing than sailing ships. By 1833, the navy began operating steamship services to Algiers from its base in Toulon (Charles-André Julien 1964, 51).¹² Marseille merchants, who had contributed transport ships to the invasion fleet, protested the navy's control of these services for retarding the development of privately owned steamship companies. The navy's initial view was that private enterprise could not handle the task of regularly transporting men and war materiel to North Africa, nor could private capital afford to finance and operate fleets of steamships to meet the increasing demands of the French military as they extended their occupation over the Algerian coastline and interior (Pierre Guiral 1957, 63-65).

Indeed, steamships were a capital-intensive technology that required a different organization than sailing ships. Sailing ships would be owned by one merchant, or dividend among merchants in 1/24 shares, and the captain acted on his own initiative on where and when to sail (and what cargo to transport and passengers to carry). Steamships, in contrast, worked best when they were financed, constructed, and operated in fleets by steamship companies that sailed on regular schedules for the convenience of merchants and shippers. The larger organization that made steamships effective was undercut by factors such as the high costs of financing their construction as well as their inefficient engines, resulting in higher coal consumption that drove up operating costs. For the entrepreneur looking to invest in steamships, the barriers to entry proved very high indeed. Nonetheless, Marseille merchants attempted to establish Marseille-Algeria steamship services in the 1830s with limited success which in turn justified the navy's control of steamship communications with Algeria from its base in Toulon (Daniel Headrick 1988, 35-37; Roland Caty and Elaine Richard 1986, 21, 46).

Despite the French Navy's near monopoly on steamship transport, its network lost money and by the 1840s the navy began searching for ways to cut costs. In the process, they turned to shipping companies looking for

¹² Also see Jean-Pierre Dubreuil (1975, 61, 333).

lucrative sources of revenue for their expensive steamships and to jump start the beginning of a steam-powered French merchant marine. What bound these two interests together was the mail contract. Beginning in 1842, the Marseille-based Compagnie Bazin obtained a mail contract from the Ministry of War to operate a Marseille-Algiers service in tandem with the navy's Toulon-Algiers service. The success of the Compagnie Bazin's service saw the gradual abandonment of the navy's Toulon-based services by 1854, although the navy still monopolized the trade between Algerian ports until 1866 as private companies took over the operations of linking France and Algeria. The Compagnie Bazin, however, lost its contract to Messageries Maritimes in 1854, which served Algeria until 1871, then was succeeded by the Compagnie Valéry Frères from 1871 to 1880, when the French Line obtained the mail contract for Algeria.¹³

Contracts between shipping lines and governments for mail subsidies elaborated four main points of a concession: the service to be provided, the duration of the concession, the subsidy furnished by the state to the line, and the ability of the line to furnish the appropriate ships to provide the proper service. Furthermore, the government contract contained a clause to not subsidize other companies serving the same routes as the subsidized line. The duration of the mail contract usually lasted between ten to twenty years to take into account the estimated lifespan of a ship. When the concession came up for renewal, it could take into account recent maritime innovations in speed and construction to readjust the conditions of the mail contract and spur shipping companies to build new tonnage (Berneron-Couvenhes 2007a, 264-275). The specific financial aspects of the mail contract could also be renegotiated during the renewal process. Mail contracts made early steamship services economically viable and afforded a great amount of prestige to shipping companies both as ambassadors of the state, but attractive to shippers seeking reliable schedules. Examples include Britain's P&O and Cunard Lines, Austrian Lloyd, and France's Messageries Maritimes and French Line. As steam engines became more economic to operate, other shipping companies,

¹³ Centre des Archives Economiques et Financières (Hereafter CAEF) B 31.146 (ex AN F30 254), No 484 Chambre des députés annexe au procès-verbal de la séance du 8 mars 1897, *Projet de loi*, 3.

usually smaller and Marseille-based, emerged alongside the subsidized ones that served Algeria such as the CNM (Compagnie de Navigation Mixte), SGTM (Société Générale des Transports Maritimes à vapeur), Cyprien Fabre, and Caillol and Saint Pierre.¹⁴

Shipping lines that received mail contracts and their tangible and intangible advantages, however, faced stringent government regulations regarding seaworthiness and speed to meet the obligations of the mail service they provided to the state. In time of war, subsidized shipping lines were expected to surrender their ships to the navy to be used as auxiliary cruisers with design specifications for speed and plans of where to place artillery on deck, or for the transport of goods or troops for the war effort (Headrick 1988, 37; Henry Grout 1908, 112-117). Carrying the mail for the state was one aspect of the mail contract; it also designated types of freight and passengers to be carried at discounted rates of thirty percent such as military and governmental personnel, missionaries free of charge, and the transport of arms at the lowest possible rate. Lines with mail contracts therefore provided a public service, a service for the state in addition to their obligations to private and commercial interests (Berneron-Couvenhes 2007a, 266).

Enter the French Line, 1880-1919

In 1879, the Compagnie Valéry-Frères, which had held the mail contract since 1871 that would soon be renegotiated for 1881, appeared to be weakening financially. Other Marseille shipping companies such as the CNM, SGTM, and Fraissinet viewed the Valéry-Frères' troubles as an opportunity to obtain the mail contract for themselves, but also demanded a higher subsidy (up to 1.6 million francs) to meet expanded itineraries and higher speeds presumed to be in the new contract while the new contract wished to lower the subsidy. Eugène Pereire entered the fray and undercut these competitors with a 493,500-franc proposition which the government accepted. However, when the French Line began operating the new contract in 1881, the government added new itineraries to eastern

¹⁴ CAEF B 31.146, "Note sur le renouvellement des concessions des services maritimes postaux entre la France et l'Algérie," Ministère du Commerce, de l'Industrie et des Colonies, 1892, 8

Algerian and Tunisian ports for a total subsidy of 880,000 francs, still lower than the previous Valéry-Frères subsidy at 958,000 francs and for a much larger network (262,634 $\frac{2}{3}$ leagues vs. 99,800 leagues). Other reasons for Pereire's figure were financial—the company had raised 40 million francs in capital so it deemed a high subsidy unnecessary—as well as ideological, Pereire's view on subsidies was that they should not distort the market too much (Bois 1996, 74-75).

Between 1880 and 1881, the French Line constructed twelve *Moïse*-type ships (adding a thirteenth in 1884) for its Mediterranean services, and acquired Valéry Frères' Marseille offices, docks, and fleet. In 1880 alone, the French Line sailed 310 voyages transporting eighty-two thousand passengers and eighty thousand tons of freight. The following year, the French Line helped transport troops and materiel to Tunisia during its annexation by France. By the end of 1882, the company operated 800 Mediterranean voyages that earned 14.5 million francs, one million more than its Le Havre-New York service. Despite a cholera epidemic in 1884, the French Line expanded its services by creating joint rail-sea tickets to encourage tourism and through transit of cargo with the Paris-Lyon-Mediterranean (PLM) railway. In 1887, the French Line introduced a daily Marseille-Algiers service. Finally, the company's Mediterranean fleet began to be augmented by a new "rapide" class of five ships that would introduce 24-hour crossings in 1888, one of which was the *Eugène Pereire* (Bois 1996, 80, 84-85, 89).

While the French Line went from strength to strength during the 1880s, its honeymoon period ended during the 1890s when its mail contract came under review in anticipation of its renewal in 1895. Fearing the contract gave the French Line too much power in the Algerian market, the contract lapsed over the Senate's rejection of Parliament's proposed project in 1895. The Senate decided instead opened the transport of the mails to all shipping companies who could meet certain speed and frequency requirements, dividing the 880,000-franc subsidy among the participating companies.¹⁵ In an unintended consequence, the French Line discontinued the six least profitable lines and in 1895-1896 lowered speeds to reduce

¹⁵ CAEF B.31 146, Sénat, Rapport Monestier, Annexe au Procès-verbaux de la séance du 14 décembre 1897, 5.

coal consumption and costs for those that remained. Finding its liners idle in Marseille, the French Line decided to send them on cruises in the Mediterranean or Northern Europe (Barbance 1995, 113-114). The disappointing results of this experiment led the French government in 1896 to sign a convention with three companies—the French Line, the Compagnie de Navigation Mixte (CNM), and Société Générale des Transports Maritimes à Vapeur (SGTM), which was approved by law in 1898. Dividing the contract between three companies resulted from a desire to ensure some competition, but the French Line remained preponderant. Of a total of twenty routes, the French Line obtained thirteen, the CNM six, and the SGTM one. The overall network continued the trend of expanded itineraries and consisted of a 1.6 million-franc subsidy and a further 400,000 francs available for speed bonuses.¹⁶

Commercial legislation was a second factor that changed the French Line's relationship with colonial Algeria. In 1889, the French Parliament passed a monopoly law that reserved all Franco-Algerian trade exclusively to French-registered vessels. Although colonial Algeria had a long history of monopolist legislation dating from the 1830s, it was overturned in the 1860s only to return two decades later. The justifications of the 1889 law included that it was a complement to the 1884 customs union between France and Algeria, and it would give a guaranteed market to ailing French shipping companies whose trade was seriously eroded by either railway or international competition.¹⁷ Algerian chambers of commerce debated the issue and could not reach agreement on the value of the monopoly, but at first it appears to have been welcomed only to come under intense criticism by the 1890s.¹⁸ One of the most common criticisms of the monopoly was that it artificially and unjustly raised commercial freight rates. An early example of this line of thinking was *Algérie Libre* by Félix Dessoliers (1895, 174) that specifically mentioned the shipping monopoly as a burden to Algeria's commerce. In particular, the book accused shipping companies of using the monopoly to charge unjustly high rates

¹⁶ CAEF B 31.146, Rapport Monestier, 7.

¹⁷ AN F 12 1689, Chambre de Commerce du Havre (hereafter CCH), "Navigation entre la France et l'Algérie," 15 avril 1887, 1-4.

¹⁸ AN F 12 1689 dossier 1, Chambre de Commerce de Constantine (hereafter CCC), "Navigation entre la France et l'Algérie," 5 février 1888, 1-3.

for passengers and cargo, costing the colony of 8 million francs per year. The commercial ramifications extended and intermingled with the politics of mail contracts, too. The French Line (and to a lesser extent the CNM and SGTM) had the prestige of the mail contract as well as commercial preeminence in Algeria. The company was therefore accused of benefitting from a double monopoly, one from the 1889 law, and the second from the mail contract that helped give it a competitive edge. Reserving Franco-Algerian shipping solely to French-flagged shipping companies damaged the colony's commercial and political links rather than strengthened them, so went the Euro-Algerian line of reasoning. The debates over the value of mail contracts and monopoly became intertwined and nearly indistinguishable from the French Line in the years after the 1898 contract (A. Froger 1934, 24).

Renegotiating mail contracts were extremely intricate and complicated affairs. As one 1897 government report noted, "the organization of shipping services between [France and Algeria] touches on many different interests. A regular and economical postal service are not the only factors to consider; there are political, military and commercial ones, too."¹⁹ These interlocking factors help explain why debates over seemingly mundane mail contracts could become quite lively and reveal the importance of colonial Algeria's maritime connections with France. One point of contention was the question of itineraries and routes served. Euro-Algerians generally advocated for increased services serving multiple ports, something which the French government generally advocated but usually not to the extent of Euro-Algerians. The French Line, in contrast, advocated for a rationalization and concentration of services to the largest ports. The company began this in 1887 by creating daily Marseille-Algiers services, but in doing so sought to suppress its services from the smaller and less profitable ports of Sète and Marseille. The President of Algiers' Chamber of Commerce objected to the company's move, expressing that "Algeria's connections with France must always be made easier, more frequent, more rapid, and more complete, but they must never be reduced. To eliminate and unprofitable service that assures public order would be a

¹⁹ CAEF B 31.146, Rapport Monestier, 1-2.

grave reduction.”²⁰ In this light, various proposals between 1892 and 1895 that gave most favor to Euro-Algerian interests combined daily Marseille-Algiers voyages, expanded services from Port-Vendres (the closest port to Algeria and it offered a calmer passage), and proposed to add a voyage that linked Nice to Corsica and Algeria. It offered more direct Algeria-France voyages from the small ports Mostaganem and Bougie. By increasing the number of ports covered in the contract, these Euro-Algerian interests hoped to open more markets to trade as well as assure that every Algerian port of every size had a direct voyage to France in order to avoid the colony’s fragmented and slow road and railway networks. Once established, such routes potentially would be difficult to discontinue.²¹

Eugène Pereire succinctly summarized his company’s position in 1892 when he declared “no line covers its costs. The state only has to subsidize three: Marseille-Algiers, Marseille-Oran, and Marseille-Tunis. The others [lines and ports] are worth nothing. Philippeville is deplorable, Bône poor, Bougie odious, the subsidized ships that serve these ports have no reason to exist. It’s throwing money out the window, both for the government and for the company.”²² He expressed the desire to concentrate subsidized shipping on the largest ports—Algiers, Oran, and Tunis—where a small number of expensive ships could be constructed for high speeds and rapid services. Passengers, mail, or cargo on these ships could then transfer to special trains to connect to other cities. For the smaller ports, inexpensive cargo liners with smaller passenger capacities could be used instead of

²⁰ ANMT 2006 033 M 0004 (ex 9 AQ 372), Conseil d’administration, séance du 10 mai 1887; Archives Nationales d’Algérie (Hereafter DZ/AN) DZ/AN/1F/378, Adjudication des services postaux: exécution des services correspondances et de transport maritime, 1844-1895, LXV.-10.-a., Président de la Chambre de Commerce d’Alger à M. le Préfet d’Alger, “Demande d’un service rapide quotidien entre Alger et Marseille,” Alger le 3 juin 1887.

²¹ CAEF B 31.145 (ex ANP F 30 254), “Note – sur le renouvellement des concessions des services maritimes postaux entre la France, l’Algérie et la Tunisie,” 1891, 8-13.

²² CAEF B 31.146 (ex ANP F 30 254), “Sous-commission chargée de rédiger un rapport provisoire sur la question du renouvellement des concessions des services maritimes postaux entre la France, la Corse et l’Algérie,” 6^e séance, 9 juillet 1892, 2-3.

more expensive passenger liners. These services would be unsubsidized and service would only be determined solely by commercial needs.²³

Pereire's plan expressed the company's desire to concentrate routes to key ports, but it also brought up the question of what an appropriate amount of subsidy should be for the services provided. As a for-profit company, Pereire had to make sure the non-commercial clauses of the mail contract did not affect the company's bottom line. Pereire also made great pains to point out how the company's Mediterranean subsidy was the least subsidized within his own company and among the French merchant marine at large, a fact that is borne out statistically. Mail contracts were calculated in total *lieues marines* or maritime leagues, a unit of length of three nautical miles or 1.852 kilometers. The weight of the subsidy was divided by league. In 1892 (see Table 1), the French Line's Atlantic, Caribbean, and Mediterranean networks totaled 549,149 $\frac{1}{3}$ leagues. Respectively, the Atlantic totaled 110,482 $\frac{2}{3}$ leagues (20%), the Caribbean at 176,032 leagues (32%), and the Mediterranean 262,634 $\frac{2}{3}$ leagues (48%). The total annual subsidy the French Line received was 10,838,000 francs which divided among the three networks as follows: Atlantic 5,480,000 (49.60 francs per league or 51%), Caribbean 4,478,000 (25.44 francs per league or 41%), and Mediterranean 880,000 francs (3.55 francs per league or 8%). Globally speaking, the French Line's Mediterranean network made up nearly one quarter of the total of all subsidized networks, but less than five percent of the total subsidy amongst all the networks.²⁴ While Pereire had won the contract in 1879 by undercutting rival proposals, by 1892 he deemed a much higher subsidy to be necessary, roughly two million francs, for a 300,000-league network (6.71 francs per league) concentrated mostly on the largest ports.²⁵

The finance ministry agreed in 1892 that Algeria had the lowest subsidies of any network, but worried that a subsidy no higher than two

²³ CAEF, 6^e séance, 1892, 3.

²⁴ CAEF, "Note" 1892, 21; *Bulletin mensuel des postes et des télégraphes* 12, December 1892.

²⁵ CAEF, "Note" 1892, 13.

Perry

Table 1
1892 Maritime Postal Network

Networks	Annual Distance Traveled (Voyages)			Annual Subsidy			
	in Leagues	% of Total	% of Company	in Francs	per league	% of Total	% of Company
Messageries Maritimes							
Mediterranean	58,240.00	5.18	12.44	792,491.15	13.61	3.27	6.36
Indochina	208,442.66	18.54	44.52	6,670,144.00	32.00	27.49	53.49
East Africa	52,336.00	4.66	11.18	1,041,920.00	19.91	4.29	8.36
Australia	99,792.00	8.88	21.32	3,085,824.00	30.92	12.72	24.75
Brazil and La Plata	49,360.00	4.39	10.54	878,904.16	17.81	3.62	7.05
Total	468,170.66	41.64	100.00	12,469,283.31	26.63	51.40	100.00
Compagnie Générale Transatlantique							
New York	110,482.67	9.83	20.12	5,480,000.00	49.60	22.59	50.56
Antilles and Mexico	176,032.00	15.66	32.06	4,478,000.00	25.44	18.46	41.32
Algeria and Tunisia	262,634.66	23.36	47.83	880,000.00	3.35	3.63	8.12
Total	549,149.33	48.85	100.00	10,838,000.00	19.74	44.67	100.00
Compagnie Insulaire							
Corsica	50,700.00	4.51	100.00	355,000.00	7.00	1.46	100.00
British Railway Companies							
Cross-Channel	5,353.33	0.48	100.00	100,000.00	18.68	0.41	100.00
Chargeurs Réunis and Fraissinet							
West Africa	50,856.00	4.52	100.00	497,978.00	9.79	2.05	100.00
Total	1,124,229.32	100.00		24,260,261.31		100.00	

Source: See text.

million francs would be politically feasible in Parliament.²⁶ By the time of the 1898 contract, and after proposals that ranged from 2.75 to 9 million francs were debated and rejected in Parliament,²⁷ the 1898 network created a 312,699-league network with a 1.6 million-franc subsidy and a further 400,000 francs available for speed bonuses. The new contract broke down to 5.12 francs-per-league, increased to 6.30 with the speed bonuses.²⁸ Despite the increase in subsidy and extended network, a 1910 chart (see Table 2) shows that the percentages of the French Line's Algerian network and subsidy remained roughly the same (25 percent of total leagues and 6 percent of the total subsidy given to all networks).

Algeria Fights Back, 1900-1940

The period of 1892-1898 brought to light the multiple and interlocking interests in renegotiating the mail contract. However, after 1898 more pointed critiques began being formed against Algeria's shipping companies, particularly in Algeria. The timing is no coincidence. In the 1890s, an assertive "Algerianist" movement began amongst Euro-Algerian settlers to assert more autonomous control and a distinct cultural identity from France. The Algerianist movement gained a political voice through deputies elected to sit in the National Assembly in Paris and also within the colony with the formation of the Financial Delegations in 1898. The Financial Delegations oversaw the colony's annual budget and matters of transportation, and in particular railways and shipping were frequent topics of extensive discussion. In the Financial Delegations, the Algerianist movement began advocating for the colony to have greater control over Algeria's infrastructure instead of being dependent on private companies or the whims of metropolitan French politics. One of the earliest examples of the Algerianist movement is Félix Dessoliers' *Algérie Libre* which specifically cited that shipping companies, protected by

²⁶ CAEF 7^e séance 1892, "Sous-commission chargée de rédiger un rapport provisoire sur la question du renouvellement des concessions des services maritimes postaux entre la France, la Corse et l'Algérie," 1.

²⁷ CAEF Rapport Mesurier, 3-4.

²⁸ AN, F 12 7463, "Tableau des services maritimes postaux subventionnés sur le budget des postes et des télégraphes au 31 décembre 1910."

Table 2
1910 Maritime Postal Network

Networks	Annual Distance Traveled (Voyages)			Annual Subsidy			
	in Leagues	% of total	% of company	in Francs	per League	% of total	% of company
Messageries Maritimes							
Mediterranean	103,774.67	8.17	17.15	1,351,665.03	13.025	5.18	9.82
Indochina	192,140.00	15.13	31.75	5,956,340.00	31.000	22.81	43.27
Australia	104,329.33	8.22	17.24	3,234,209.33	31.000	12.39	23.49
Indian Ocean	96,232.00	7.58	15.90	1,924,640.00	20.000	7.37	13.98
Brazil and La Plata	108,602.00	8.55	17.95	1,300,000.00	11.970	4.98	9.44
Total	605,078.00	47.65	100.00	13,766,854.36	22.752	52.73	100.00%
Compagnie Générale Transatlantique							
New York	110,482.67	8.70	23.75	5,000,000.00	45.256	19.15	47.41
Antilles and Mexico	145,588.00	11.46	31.30	4,478,000.00	30.758	17.15	42.46
Algeria and Tunisia	209,022.66	16.46	44.94	1,068,941.88	5.114	4.09	10.14
Total	465,093.33	36.62	100.00	10,546,941.88	22.677	40.40	100.00

Table 2 Continued

Colonial Transatlantiques

Networks	Annual Distance Traveled (Voyages)			Annual Subsidy			
	in Leagues	% of total	% of company	in Francs	per League	% of total	% of company
Compagnie de Navigation Mixte							
Algeria and Tunisia	85,314.67	6.72	100.00	436,299.22	5.114	1.67	100.00
Société Générale des Transports Maritimes à Vapeur							
Algeria and Tunisia	18,546.67	1.46	100.00	94,847.67	5.114	0.36	100.00
<i>Algeria and Tunisia Total</i>	312,884.00	24.64	100.00	1,600,088.78	5.114	6.13	100.00
Compagnie des Chargeurs Réunis							
West Africa	25,964.00	2.04	100.00	266,000.00	10.245	1.02	100.00
Compagnie Fraissinet							
Corsica	64,445.33	5.07	100.00	550,000.00	8.534	2.11	100.00
Compagnie du Chemin de fer du Nord							
English Channel	5,475.00	0.43	100.00	447,500.00	81.735	1.71	100.00
Total	1,269,917.00	100		26,108,443.14		100	

Source: See text.

monopoly, charged high freight rates which cost the colony 8 million francs annually.

Financial Delegates amplified Dessolier's argument by conjuring up similar figures to demonstrate Algeria's burden and exploitation at the hands of shipping companies. For example, Henri Vérola claimed that transport costs from London to Calcutta were the same as from Algiers to Marseille, or that companies made 15 million francs extra in profit because of Algeria's closed market. In addition to these charges, by the turn of the twentieth century, Algeria had to pay the 400,000-franc speed bonuses in the 1898 contract from its own budget, meaning that it had a small, but direct, financial stake in the French Line's subsidized shipping services. Protections did exist, however, in that the postal companies could only charge certain rates, but in general mail contracts only provided the most summary guidelines for the transport of general cargo (Jacques Bouveresse 2010, 639-640, 643). French colonial governments rarely subsidized shipping services, and the French Post Office bore nearly the entire cost of mail contract subsidies. In contrast, the British Post Office continually sought to reduce its mail contract payments by having colonial governments share in the costs. British colonial governments contributed to up to one third of mail subsidies, a total of 7 million francs. In contrast, only the colonial governments of the Cochinchine province in Indochina and Madagascar directly subsidized Messageries Maritimes in 1882 and 1895, respectively, but for a total of roughly 600,000 francs (Marie-Françoise Berneron-Couvenhes 2007b, 653-658). Once Algeria began paying its 400,000-franc share in 1903, French colonies paid 1 million francs for their steamship services. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw increased scrutiny surrounding mail contract negotiations in both French and British shipping. These disputes took form in colonies attempting, and often failing or at best only partially succeeding, to assert independence from their mother countries. Freda Harcourt mentions in the British case the grumblings from colonial governments in paying for shipping subsidies and failed attempts to establish colonial shipping companies to compete against mail companies (Harcourt 1988, 11-12). Only in South Africa, after a prolonged mail contract negotiation crisis between 1908 and 1912, did the country wrest important reductions in shipping rates and control over the Union-Castle company's business

practices in exchange for a mail contract (G.R. Berridge 1987, 3-5).²⁹ A similar process occurred in France, as the French Parliament questioned the monetary amount of subsidies to both Messageries Maritimes and the French Line. Both companies faced lengthier contract disputes after 1900, with Messageries Maritimes in a prolonged renegotiation between 1908 and 1911 that resulted in greater government oversight into the company's operations (Berneron-Couvenhes 2007a, 273-274). For the French Line, each of its networks saw lengthy contract renewals: the North Atlantic between 1911 and 1913, the Caribbean between 1901 and 1911, and the Mediterranean after 1908, though the latter network produced no new contract (Barbance 1955, 197-204).

As the renewal of the 1898 contract played out, the Financial Delegations leveraged their financial stake in the colony's steamship services by making the same moves as British colonies did against mail companies. As a body, the Financial Delegations were united in their skepticism towards the French Line's commercial power, but had little room for action that would not involve the colony paying a larger portion of any new subsidy. Rather, they argued that the hidden costs of the monopoly already consisted of Algeria's shipping subsidy to the French Line. The extra profits it reaped provided more than enough money for faster ships and improved service (Maurice Michel 1926, 27-28, 40). Cognizant that no mail contract would result in reduced services, especially in the smaller ports of eastern Algeria, the Financial Delegations agreed to maintain the current contract until a better one could be drawn up, preferably one that had more oversight over freight rates and protections from potential abuse of the monopoly from shipping companies ("Historique" 1915, 156-157).

The actions of the Financial Delegations and the French Line contributed to no new mail contract after 1908. After that date, the 1898 contract was extended to 1910, then tacitly renewed every six months until the outbreak of war in 1914. The same issues of itineraries, level of subsidy, and countering the commercial dominance of the French Line remained the same as in 1892. In 1904, when planning began in earnest for renewing the contract, the French Line's new President, Jules Charles-

²⁹ See also See Vivian Edgar Solomon (1978).

Roux, remained as convinced as his predecessor Eugène Pereire that a better-operated system would be a limited contract and concentrated services on only the largest ports. Charles-Roux lamented that “[the settlers] who I love very much in my capacity as a colonialist—and I think I have proven it to them—are sometimes like spoiled children who misunderstand our role as a subsidized shipping company. They figure that because we receive a small subsidy, they have the right to incessantly demand improvements to our service and no matter what we do, we never satisfy them.”³⁰ In 1913, when the French government drew up another contract, the French Line along with the CNM and SGTM rejected it on the grounds that the 2 million franc subsidy was too little and demanded an 11 million franc subsidy (“Historique” 1915, 158). Facing the intransigence of the French Line and indifference of Paris, the Financial Delegations began reconsidering renewing the mail contract at all. Instead, Financial Delegates such as Emile Morinaud began advocating in 1914 for the creation of an Algerian-flagged fleet under the control of the colony to compete with the French Line’s dominance (Bouveresse 2010, 644-645).

Morinaud’s proposal was initially overshadowed by the outbreak of World War I in 1914, but his idea gained traction during the war. The general requisition of merchant tonnage for war duties led the French Line to reduce its sailings by half, as well as the increased losses of ships to U-boats which created a general transportation crisis in Algeria. In 1916, Financial Delegate and later Member of Parliament Emile Broussais of Algiers proposed a dramatic organization of Mediterranean shipping where a state financed fleet of ships would be operated through railway companies. Both the Financial Delegations and French Parliament initially approved of this proposal, with the French government ordering eight ships for the anticipated new organization, but postwar financial instability sunk the project by 1923. In addition, the French Line, CNM, and SGTM renounced the 1898 mail contract in 1919, leaving the colony’s maritime transportation in disarray (Bouveresse 2010, 656).

³⁰ Archives de Wilaya d’Oran (Hereafter AWO) BP326 Pierre Desquais, “A la Compagnie Transatlantique,” in *Algérie commerciale, maritime, agricole et industrielle* 9, 29 June 1907.

John Dal Piaz, like Pereire and Charles-Roux before him, disapproved of the new organization and welcomed the company's freer hand unconstrained by a mail contract. The French Line even received four of the eight state-built ships (the CNM received 3 and the SGTM 1), on lease from the French government. These ships were operated by leases that determined schedules and itineraries, but no operating subsidy (Jean-Michel Harel 2001, 267).³¹ The financially conservative Financial Delegations of the 1920s decided to work more collaboratively with the French Line and the other companies and managed to include clauses in the leases to determine price indices and freight rates. An even greater coup occurred in the 1930s, when the French Line, nearly bankrupt by the Depression while also building its colossal superliner *Normandie*, was reorganized and partially nationalized in 1933. During the reorganization, Emile Morinaud, President of Algiers' Chamber of Commerce, was invited by the state to sit on the Board of Directors on the French Line, giving Euro-Algerian settlers a voice within the French Line (Harel 2001, 269-270, 287-288; Barbance 1955, 255-260). After the company reorganized, it raised enough funds to build a new, fast liner for Algeria, the *Ville d'Alger*, which it advertised as a "little *Normandie*" for the Mediterranean because of its speed, silhouette, and luxury which were until this point unknown in Algeria. Morinaud in particular celebrated the *Ville d'Alger*'s maiden arrival in Algiers in September 1935 and proclaimed that "if Algeria is not [the French Line's] most profitable customer, it is most assuredly [its] best one."³²

Conclusion

The French Line's Mediterranean network was unique in its operation from the company's other routes, unique in its geographic scope, and reflected Algeria's unique status within the French empire. The French Line, not just a company that showcased France's prestige to the world across the oceans, played an essential role in linking the "two halves" of

³¹ Also see ANMT 9 AQ 12 "Rapports du Conseil d'Administration, 1910-1936" Dossier 1 – 1910-1923, Assemblée Générale 1923, 19.

³² ANMT 9 AQ 12 rapports Conseil d'Administration, dossier 2 (1924-1936), Assemblée Générale de 1935, 7; DZ/AN/1F/1935/Boite 85/dossier 3 – Discours de Morard, Voyage inaugural du *Ville d'Alger*, 25 September 1935, 13.

France separated by the Mediterranean Sea. Its founders looked to the colonial market in the 1850s and developed an extensive sphere of operations in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The French Line's Algerian network even outlived Algeria's decolonization in 1962 and the French Line's last passenger transatlantic crossing in 1974. In 1969, the French Line spun off its Mediterranean services to form the *Compagnie Générale Transméditerranéenne* (CGTM), which became the *Société Nationale de Corse Maritimes* (SNCM) in 1976, though the SNCM ceased operations in early 2016 (Bois 1996; Denis Consard 2016). The history of the French Line in North Africa reveals that a "small" network highlighted the business interests of the company's founders, and how the colonies played into its business strategy.

While a technology of global historical significance, scholars like à Campo (1996), Miller (2012), and MacKenzie (2004) have demonstrated the importance of steam shipping both as a business enterprise and a projection of imperialism in both large and small waters. The French Line in Algeria helped reinforce and deepen Algeria's connections to France and even as a "small" network demonstrated a remarkable density and scope of operations. Yet behind the façade of regularity, power, and efficiency of steamship lines lay a fraught reality of maintaining a large enterprise (Harcourt 2006, viii). Relations between the French Line, the state, and colonial governments, however, was not always a cordial one. As Freda Harcourt, V.E. Solomon (1978), and G.R. Berridge have demonstrated in British colonies, campaigns by colonial bodies to gain more power over shipping operations show the development of political and nationalist aspirations in colonies as intimately linked with control of infrastructure and communications. Of these campaigns, only South Africa succeeded in winning large concessions in 1912 and eventually developed its own merchant fleet after 1946 (Berridge 1987, 17-19). Similar projects put forth by Euro-Algerian settlers, however, did not meet with the same success and they subsequently pursued greater control of shipping by working with shipping companies rather than against them, as evidenced with the French Line's reorganization and partial nationalization in 1933. The power wielded by the French Line in the Mediterranean reveals how that shipping organization created and embedded itself within imperial political structures.

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