

**Roberto Cantoni.** *Oil Exploration, Diplomacy, and Security in the Early Cold War: The Enemy Underground.* Routledge Studies in Modern European History Series. New York: Routledge, 2017. 290 pp. \$149.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-138-69290-9.

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*Oil Exploration, Diplomacy, and Security in the Early Cold War* is a fresh addition to the expanding literature on the history of oil. Roberto Cantoni aptly blends history of technology, material politics, European history, and Cold War history. His multidisciplinary approach is combined with impressive archival research from oil companies' archives, providing a new history of the European oil industry from the immediate post-war years until the early 1960s.

As stressed by the book's title, Cantoni focuses on the technical and economic issues that shaped the politics of oil in the twenty years between 1944 and 1962, topical years for the history of Europe and its position in the new global order. It may seem that the European-US-Soviet relations in the early Cold War years have been analyzed under every possible angle, but Cantoni finds a new approach by focusing on the European oil industry, an understudied topic in both European and energy history. Even more innovatively, he does not focus on governments or international organizations (not exclusively at least) but on the technicians, engineers, and technocrats who constitute the apparently "nonpolitical" aspects of the oil industry. These actors are often left in the shadow in grand narratives on the politics of oil,

but they are the *de facto* key holders of the functioning mechanisms of the industry.

The book is organized around five case studies that occurred between 1945 and 1962, all important parts of the history of the relations between Europe and the US during the early years of the Cold War. In the first chapter, he reconstructs the foundation of the Italian oil company ENI (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi) as a state company, showing how this decision went against US corporate interests in the immediate aftermath of World War II. In the second chapter, Cantoni shifts the focus to France, a country with a very different outlook than Italy on the global arena but with a similar approach to the oil industry, namely, in its willingness to establish a solid national industry rather than simply rely on US-controlled supplies. This common view could have led to an alliance in the energy policies of the two countries, but the Algerian war, the topic of chapter 3, caused instead a series of diplomatic incidents between Italy and France. Cantoni reconstructs the involvement of ENI in the war, showing not only that Italy, through its oil company, was determined to regain influence on the Mediterranean but also that ENI as a company was much bolder and more ambitious than the Italian government. Chapter 4 broadens the hori-

zon further by analyzing the politics of pipeline projects around Europe: Cantoni examines the conflicting interests of European, American, and Russian actors in the largest importing area in the world. Finally, chapter 5 focuses on the European Economic Community and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) responses to the “invasion” of Soviet oil on the European market, pointing to how economic and technical issues were at the basis of political responses.

Cantoni starts with national-level stories to move to transnational, international, and finally supranational cases, and he explains the complexities of the many different actors involved (political, technical, economic, and geostrategic), without simplifying but shifting between parallel or intersectional layers of analysis. His narrative is particularly effective in differentiating between companies and governments, stressing the different strategies, approaches, and objectives of political and business actors. The most interesting aspect of the book is not only that Cantoni provides an accurate reconstruction of the international oil industry at the time but also that he focuses on subsidiaries, technical branches, and contractors: Standard Oil of New Jersey (today's Exxon), as well as its Italian branch Italian Petroleum Company (SPI) and the Western Geophysical Company. Rarely mentioned in oil politics literature, it is through these companies that fundamental networks of knowledge transfers and personal access developed between countries, apparently far from chancelleries and politics, but in reality, an integral part of diplomacy: for example, the geodata passed by ENI's technicians who had visited the Sahara to the Algerian delegation that was negotiating the end of the independence war in Evian; or the role of Western Geophysical Company in training Italian technicians. Cantoni explains the role of geophysical surveys in intelligence gathering and the importance played by geodata in negotiations; he also shows the importance of market conditions in shaping apparently

political decisions, from oil routes to supply contracts.

While the historical reconstruction is meticulous and the episodes analyzed are put in the larger narrative of Cold War international relations, the book could have been braver in the wider analysis of the role of economic interests and technology as “engines of history,” beyond the narrative presented. Still, *Oil Exploration, Diplomacy, and Security in the Early Cold War* remains an impressive work where techno-science meets history and global politics.

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