



# Cementing Colonialism: Labor, Violence, and Technology in Protectorate-Era Morocco

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Since the early years of the French Protectorate (1912-1956), Morocco's political history has been entwined with the production and circulation of industrial cement. An essential ingredient in Protectorate public works projects to build ports, bridges, and housing, cement enabled the transformation of the urban environment in rapidly expanding cities like Casablanca. This talk will trace this mundane construction technology from its central role in stabilizing colonial labor relations, through its disruptive potential in the hands of anti-colonial protesters, and finally to its ambiguous status in national imaginaries of development and decolonization. Early advocates of concrete construction in Casablanca such as L.J. Durante and Jean Raymond saw cement production as a means of securing not only the colonial built environment but the authority of French engineers within Morocco's Protectorate administration. Artisans like Lahcen ben Mohamed al-Glaoui described how cement created hierarchies within craft communities in the country. During the urban uprising of December 1952 in Casablanca, Moroccan residents repurposed concrete construction components for anti-colonial ends. After independence, workers at the country's largest cement plant articulated theories of dependency and development in relation to their work with this essential material. This talk ties together these distinct engagements with cement's affordances to explore the precise place of local knowledge and labor within colonial and eventually nationalist modernization projects. Understanding how workers and residents of Casablanca tested the limits of cement's capacity to enact alternative political futures in Morocco provides a window into the shifting relationship between labor, violence, and technology in North African struggles for independence.

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