

The Socio-economic Dynamics of Algeria's Hirak Protests: An Overlooked Factor

Mourad Ouchichi

University of Bejaia

info@extractivism.de | www.extractivism.de



| The Author

Dr. Mourad Ouchichi is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Bejaia in Algeria. He holds a PhD from the Institute of Political Science in Lyon, France. He is an economist and political scientist with research interests in development theory, particularly focusing on political and economic institutions. His work focuses on rentier economies, particularly in North Africa. He is also interested in comparative, sociological studies of states and the diversity of economic practices. He is a research fellow at www.extractivism.de.

DOI: 10.17170/kobra-202310048818

Extractivism Policy Brief is an Open Access online publication downloaded freely at www.extractivism.de. Readers are free to share, copy, and redistribute this document in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially, according to the [Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 Germany \(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/). Conditions imply that no changes are made to the text, and writers and the www.extractivism.de project are referenced correctly as the original. Extractivism Policy Briefs publish on social-economic, cultural, political, and timely topics concerning extractivism in both regions. Extractivism.de team is responsible for reviewing, fact-checking, editing, and publishing the final policy briefs. The opinions expressed in each publication are exclusive of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the project. Extractivism.de cannot be held liable for any consequences concerning a policy brief following its publication.

© Extractivism.de, 2023, All rights reserved.

| IN SHORT

EN

- In 2019, Algeria experienced one of the largest popular uprisings the country has ever seen in its post-independence history: the *Hirak*.
- The crisis had been looming for several years, as shifts in the political elite increased. The end of the financial boom exacerbated this process.
- Between 2015 and 2018, oil and gas export revenues declined by an average of 14% per year.
- Socioeconomic factors ultimately contributed to the outbreak of the Algerian *hirak*.

DE

- Im Jahr 2019 erlebte Algerien eine der größten Volkserhebungen, die das Land in seiner Geschichte nach der Unabhängigkeit erlebte: den *Hirak*.
- Die Krise bahnte sich seit mehreren Jahren an, denn Verschiebungen in der politischen Elite nahmen zu. Das Ende des Finanzbooms verschärft diesen Prozess.
- Zwischen 2015 und 2018 gingen die Einnahmen aus dem Export von Öl und Gas im Durchschnitt um 14 % pro Jahr zurück.
- Sozioökonomische Faktoren haben schließlich zum Ausbruch des algerischen *Hirak* beigetragen.

FR

- En 2019, l'Algérie vivait au rythme de l'un des plus importants soulèvements populaires que le pays ait connu dans son histoire post-indépendance.
- Cette crise est en gestation depuis plusieurs années, sur les braises des dissensions au sein de la classe politique, exacerbées par la fin du boom financier qui a alimenté le consensus au sommet.
- Entre 2015 et 2018, les recettes d'exportation d'hydrocarbures ont baissé à un rythme moyen de 14% par an.
- Des facteurs socio-économiques ont contribué au déclenchement du *Hirak Algérien*.

ES

- En 2019, Argelia vivía al ritmo de una de las revueltas populares más importantes que ha experimentado el país en su historia posterior a la independencia.
- La crisis se venía gestando desde hacía varios años, a medida que aumentaban los cambios en la élite política. El fin del boom financiero exacerbó este proceso.
- Entre 2015 y 2018, los ingresos por exportación de hidrocarburos disminuyeron a un ritmo medio del 14% anual.
- Factores socioeconómicos han contribuido al inicio del *Hirak argelino*.

The socio-economic dynamics of Algeria's *Hirak protests*: an overlooked factor

This paper aims to bring to light the socio-economic factors that have contributed to the outbreak of the Algerian *Hirak*, as these have often been overlooked by analysts. In the following, we shall explore this neglected aspect of one of the most significant social movements, not only in Algeria and/or the southern Mediterranean, but also in the rest of the world by virtue of its singular character.

First, we will start with a critical analysis of the conduct of economic policy during the period 1999-2014, as a historical sequence characterized by a remarkable financial ease of the state. We will then look at the economic and social consequences of the sudden turnaround in the economic situation subsequent to the oil counter-shock from the second half of 2014; more specifically, we will examine the effects of the austerity imposed on society following this significant and lasting drop in international hydrocarbon prices.

We will then attempt to deconstruct these myths that tend to reinforce the powerlessness of the masses in the face of the abuses of the authoritarian regime, namely the myth of the purchase of social peace and that of the irreversibility of the regime's hegemonic position vis-à-vis society. Finally, we will question the reasons why the social question was put on the back burner in the different platforms of claims formulated by the influential actors of the *Hirak*.

In February 2019, Algeria was living at the pace of one of the most important popular uprisings that the country has ever experienced in its post-independence history. Millions of citizens across the country took to the streets at the same time, on Friday, at 2 pm exactly. Since then, every Friday and every Tuesday (for students), millions of Algerians have been pounding the pavement for more than two years. These weekly demonstrations took place in a context of a delicate political situation, with an enfeebled and sick president who has been recognized as incapacitated since at least 2013.

This crisis has also been in the making for several years, over the embers of the rifts among the political class, exacerbated by the end of the financial boom that fueled the consensus at the top. Between 2015 and 2018, that

is to say, practically the period covering almost the entire duration of the 4th mandate, hydrocarbon export revenues declined, at an average rate of 14% per year.¹

This movement, which at the beginning was opposed to the 5th mandate for the (soon to be deposed) president A. Bouteflika, has become more radical and soon claimed the removal of the "system". This mandate, one too many, is also the expression of the Algerians' surge for dignity in the face of the "Bouteflika system", as the last avatar of a rigid regime which has pushed to its paroxysm the logic of national wealth plundering and as the incarnation of submission to imperialism. A whole part of the civil society, which had moved away from "politics" out of weariness and fatalism, was again rallying around to denounce this prebend set up as a mode of governance.

The euphoria and enthusiasm of the mobilization, then its gradual decline that is due to the health crisis and ferocious ongoing crackdown, should leave room for reflection and analysis. There is no doubt that this popular movement will continue to fuel research, analysis and studies. The present work is part of this reasoned undertaking for a better understanding and study of this unprecedented popular movement, its root causes and its future. From this standpoint, we will focus on the political, economic and social factors that triggered it. From a political economy perspective, our approach seeks to grasp the deep origins of this revolt precisely in this interplay of political, economic and social factors. Indeed, we have witnessed a real revolutionary process of interclassist nature by its component that brings together all social categories including the middle classes and the underprivileged popular strata, and especially the youth as the spearhead of this popular *Hirak*.

Indeed, we have witnessed a real revolutionary process of interclassist nature by its component that brings together all social categories including the middle classes and the underprivileged popular strata, and especially the youth as the spearhead of this popular *Hirak*. It is also deeply popular by the Algerian languages used and the radical slogans put forward. Simple songs and slogans express what the people from below aspire to,

¹ Average calculated on the basis of annual reports issued by the Bank of Algeria

namely the refusal of the regime continuity and the construction of an authentically democratic and social republic, without any interference from world powers. This people express their strong will to lead their own democratic transition in all sovereignty. They also claim this deep desire to put an end to extortion, sell-off of national economy and austerity, as they expressed their categorical refusal of the law on hydrocarbons, the finance laws (2017 and 2020) and the exploitation of shale gas (Allam, 2019).

If it is fully admitted that this popular movement has been mainly focused on the political sphere, it is equally true that the multiple socio-economic difficulties of the average citizen and the closed horizons of a precarious youth are undoubtedly the backdrop of the Hirak. Moreover, the social protests that characterized the deposed president' reign were the harbingers of the revolutionary process of February 2019. Since 2001, we have been witnessing a long cycle of social protests throughout the country, where strikes and riots are daily recorded, with claims that mainly revolve around the improvement

of the citizens' living conditions: unemployment, salary levels, unpaid wages, upgrading of jobs, refusal of privatizations of public enterprises... We would like,

through this contribution, to highlight the socio-economic dimension which is all too often omitted by the press, researchers and the majority of social actors who are involved in the movement. This is a dimension that we consider to be of crucial importance, even if it does not spontaneously appear as the central element in the genesis and rise of the Hirak.

In this work, we will seek to answer - from the privileged angle of political economy - the question of the genealogy of this revolutionary moment that constituted the Hirak. We believe that it is the repeated failures of reform attempts that are at the origin of the Hirak. Thus, the failed experiments in peaceful transition to a democratic and pluralistic society and a market-regulated productive economy - of which the reformist experiment of the early 1990s provides perhaps the most exemplary illustration (cf. Ouchichi 2014) - are at the origin of this shared revolutionary hope within society and the political upheaval that followed. When large sections of the Algerian society came to the conviction that the authoritarian regime - or more precisely the "cartel" that holds the state - is unable to carry out reforms from within, the "Grand Soir" scenario took over and regime change was imposed as the only alternative to a true democratic transformation

Chronic of a financial boom (1999-2014)

Since 1998, international prices of hydrocarbons and raw materials have risen dramatically, and Algeria has experienced an unprecedented financial boom. During the period 2003-2013, oil revenues brought in a total of 719.3 billion dollars, almost three times the total income of the previous thirty years (Rebah, 2021)². Taking advantage of this windfall, A. Bouteflika's regime launched a vast restructuring of the economic field. On the one hand, it proceeded with the centralization of public sector management and the questioning of the independence of the Central Bank. On the other hand, it decided to open up to the international market by ratifying the association agreement with the European Union in 2002 and by joining the Arab Free Trade Area in 2009, thus

completely opening up national economy to international competition without really being prepared for it (Ouchichi, 2014). In addition, the State embarked on a policy of investment in infrastructure (construction of highways, housing, dams ...) as part of economic recovery plans. These plans, which cost hundreds of billions of dollars, are carried out mainly by foreign companies. In so doing, the State has become a major source of capital accumulation for foreign companies to the detriment of national economic operators. The latter have been further weakened by imports, the volume of which has exploded since mid-2000. The following graph shows it amply.

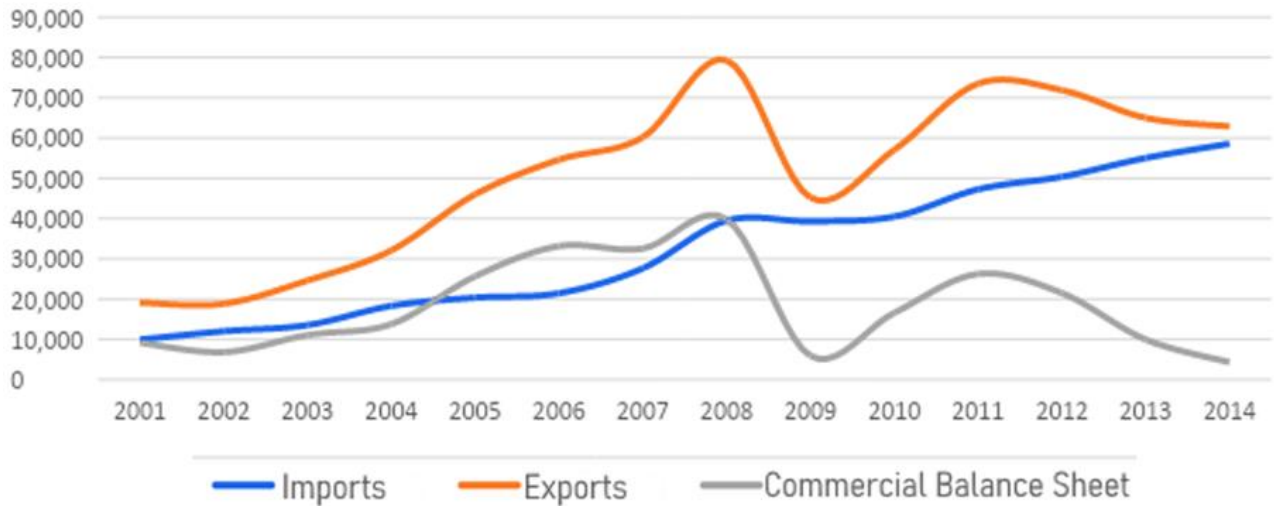
According to figures made public by the Algerian Customs, the period 2001-2014 was marked by a surge in

² Other sources mention a much larger sum. According to O. Benderra, between 2003 and 2013, Algeria has recorded between 800 and 1000 billion dollars in income from oil and gas sales.

imports. This import expansion is observed starting from 2001, with growth peaks in 2004 (+ 46.7%), 2008 (+

33.0%) and 2011 (+ 16.7%). The average annual growth of imports between 2001 and 2012 is around 33.7% /year.

Figure 1. Evolution of Algerian imports and exports between 2001 and 2014 (in millions of USD)

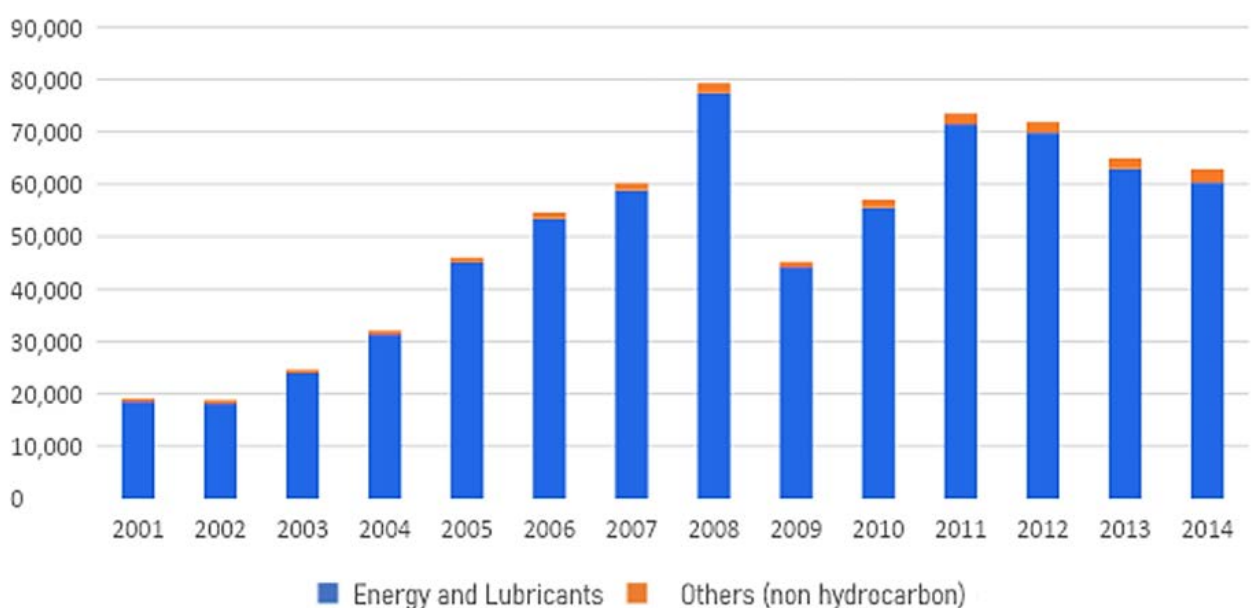


Source: Compiled by the author from Algerian Customs statistics. www.douane.gov.dz

Export growth, which was spectacular between 2001 and 2014 with a development rate of + 287%, recorded an average annual increase rate of + 26%/year, which is 8 points lower than that

recorded for imports. This rise in exports is obviously driven by hydrocarbon production as clearly shown in the following graph.

Figure 2. Evolution, per type, of Algerian exports between 2001 and 2014 (in millions of USD)

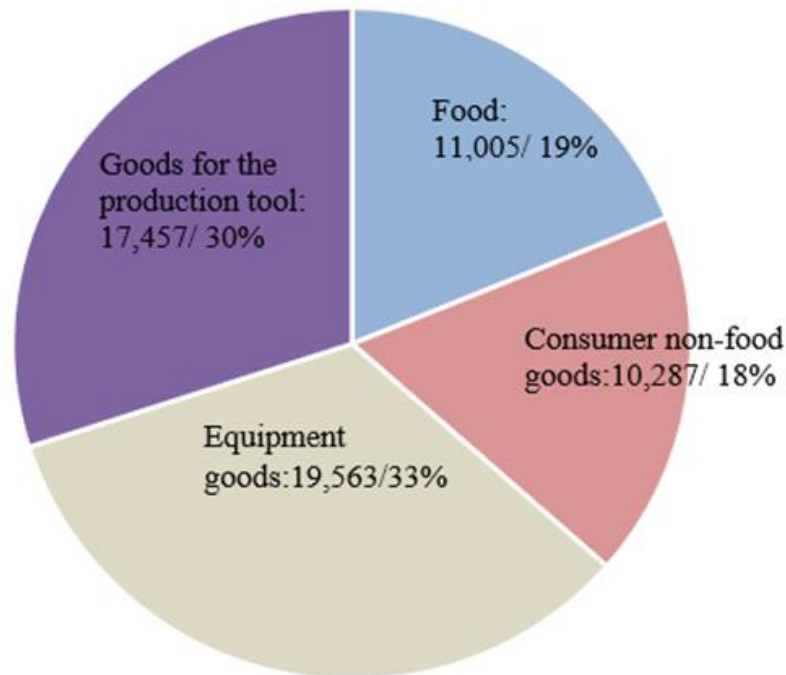


Source: Compiled by the author from Algerian Customs statistics. www.douane.gov.dz

Figure 2 illustrates the overwhelming weight of hydrocarbons in Algerian exports (\$77.3 billion), i.e. 97% of exports in 2012 (also 97% of total exports between 2001 and 2014). This situation has persisted since the mid-

1970s. Paradoxically, and against this financial ease of the State thanks to the increase in revenues from hydrocarbon exports, the actual economy has remained in a state of quasi-stagnation,

Figure 3. Breakdown of Algerian imports per type in 2014 (in millions of USD and in percentage)



Source. Compiled by the author from Algerian Customs statistics. www.douane.gov.dz.

Indeed, on the import side, the breakdown by product groups shows a generalized increase of +371.0% in imports between 2001 and 2014. The total value of imports rose from \$9.9 billion to \$58.33 billion. Non-food consumer goods recorded the highest growth rate with +579%, rising from \$1.5 billion in 2001 to nearly \$10.0 billion in 2012. As to equipment goods (second import item in 2012), including transport vehicles of all categories, the rate of growth is 284% between 2001 and 2012, rising from \$3.6 billion to \$13.8 billion. Intermediate consumer goods represent the 1st import item in 2012 with more than \$14.0 billion, they were at \$2.5 billion in 2001, a growth of + 466%. Finally, imported consumer food goods rose from \$2.4 billion to nearly \$11.0 billion between 2001 and 2014.

Despite the facilitations and the advantages which largely benefited the private sector, such as taxation, bank credits and the introduction of the famous 51/49 law on foreign investments (which has rather benefited the national private sector), still, these measures have not enabled the emergence of an important industrial sector and the multiplication of the number of large economic enterprises. Indeed, according to figures given by

the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprise (SME), at the end of 2019, the overall population of SMEs is composed of 97% of Very Small Enterprises (VSE) (workforce of less than ten employees) as a model that remains strongly dominant in the national economic fabric, followed by the Small Enterprise (SE) with 2.6% and the Medium Enterprise (ME) with 0.4% (Ministry of Industry and Mines, 2019). These figures indicate that the liberal economic orientations that have accelerated since the 2000s and the disengagement of the state from the economic sphere in favour of private capital (national and foreign) have not had the expected results. On the contrary, the enormous capital accumulated by the employers - in the form of credits, tax exemptions and other advantages - were not directed towards productive investment, which remained globally the poor relation; these investment projects were often disguised operations of draining of public funds, like the fiasco of the car assembly operation. In the end, the persistent promises to get the economic machine moving, to diversify the economy or to create economic prosperity - through the creation

of an entrepreneurial class and an economy based on private ownership - have not been fulfilled. Already in 2009, President Bouteflika himself admitted failure when he said that "liberalism has not put us on the road to paradise. The path of "economic patriotism", which

will be experimented from 2009 with the famous 51/49 rule, will not succeed, either, in giving the economy the necessary impetus to overcome this impasse of mal-development.

| Austerity sets in for the long haul

As early as the end of 2014, an important event occurs with the reversal of the oil market. The price of a barrel fell from \$96.29 in 2014 to \$49.26 in 2015, then to \$40.60 and \$52.51 in 2016 and 2017 respectively, before rising slightly in 2018. Faced with declining revenues, the government panicked and resorted to emergency measures, each one as ineffective and harmful as the next. In addition to halting structuring projects, the government decided to reduce equipment and operating budgets. Indeed, the 2016 and 2017 Finance Laws cut the equipment budget by 19 and 28% respectively. The cumulative budget cut is 41% compared to 2015. Budgetary austerity will therefore become permanent. In parallel with the stagnation of salaries and the apparent degradation of public services, thousands of jobs will be suppressed on the quiet in the public sector. Indeed, after the elimination of early retirement options, thousands of workers rushed to take advantage of this provision before it was abolished; only some of these workers

were finally replaced by new recruits. This phenomenon was observed mainly in national education and public health, as two sectors that were already heavily affected by chronic wastage and a flagrant shortage of qualified personnel. This new practice or conduct in the management of public personnel, which consists of not replacing all employees who have retired, will not only affect the civil service sector, but also the public economic sector.

To understand the depth of the popular uprising of the Hirak, we will return in what follows to the sources of the extractivist growth regime that has prevailed and still does in Algeria, especially since the restitution of peace at the end of the 1990s and the twenty years of reign of the "Bouteflika clan" in politics as well as in economic affairs.

| Corruption and predation as a mode government

Many experts and analysts have pointed to the authoritarian nature of the political regime and the refusal of openness (Belalloufi, 2019), which were often at the center of popular revolts in independent Algeria. It must be said that after the promises of democratization following the deadly riots of October 1988, the political regime has returned to the authoritarian foundations of Algerian nationalism since the January 1992 coup. Thus, under the pretext of the fight against terrorism, it has turned its back on its promises of openness and the establishment of a democratic political regime to join this authoritarian "tradition", which refuses any form of democratization and autonomy within society. This restoration of authoritarianism has thus been at the origin of

a strong mobilization of political parties and civil society in order to demand a radical change.

Alongside the political issues and the closure of the regime, there are also economic factors to consider. One cannot fully grasp the political situation in Algeria without examining the economic issue from the perspective of extractivism and the monopolization of natural resources. At the outset, it should be recalled that the struggle for the sharing/dilapidation of oil and gas rents is the most ancient source of the Algerian authoritarian regime's mode of operation/reproduction. In fact, few countries have had their wealth so systematically plundered, with the networks of corruption and prebend at the top of the state reaching an impressive scale. It is also clear that the transition to a market economy -

which began in the early 1990s - has been accompanied by a significant upsurge in corruption. The Algerian economy under Bouteflika will however be marked by a worsening of this predatory drift of the "regime". The long reign of Bouteflika (1999-2019) has been characterized by an unending and impressive series of scandals: the Khalifa affair of squandering public funds for the benefit of a company set up by a golden-boy; privatizations for the symbolic dinar; multiple cases of corruption on land, major public projects (East-West highway) and the awarding of contracts with foreign multinationals (Sonatrach-ENI-Saipem affairs); cocaine trafficking... The list of these "scabrous affairs" would be too long to list, but they all have in common that they involve members of the nomenklatura (ministers, police and army officials...) and the new bourgeois business class with its multi-billionaire oligarchs. It is therefore not surprising that Algeria is currently ranked 117th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index for the year 2021. Algeria has fallen back by 13 places with a score of 33 out of 100, compared to 36 out of 100 in the 2020 ranking, in which it was ranked 104th. The unprecedented scale of corruption and its institutionalized character are indicative of the capture of the state apparatus by hidden interests. Although Algeria escaped the "Arab Spring" in 2010/2011, the population is nonetheless exasperated by this widespread corruption, as well as by the display of wealth and arrogance of the "new caste" of privileged people to which it has given rise. The very essence of the regime – as opaque, corrupt and above all inhabited by a deep contempt for the people - which will be revealed during the two decades preceding the Hirak, will thus be a formidable catalyst of the social anger carried by this popular movement.

At the same time, the chronic instability of the authoritarian regime can also be explained by the failure of its extractivist economic model, which will ultimately prove to be at the heart of its political delegitimization. Indeed, the strengthening of the extractivist growth model of the economy has been the most prevalent trend since the liberalization and opening-up movement of the early

1990s. This model of development, by definition inconsistent, extroverted and dependent, became an object of criticism as soon as the popular movement broke out. A number of analysts will not hesitate to point out that it is the major limitations of this system, particularly in terms of transparency, mismanagement, regional imbalance and unemployment, that are at the origin of the crisis (Mehtoul, 2020; Sidi Boumedine, 2019). Finally, others do not hesitate to point to social factors, particularly unemployment, especially among graduates, which has been a major constraint on the development model and the political system for several years (Belakhdar, 2019; Mouhoud, 2020; Selmane, 2020). This economic model, a real support force in the reproduction of the political regime during the phases of rising oil prices, becomes its own gravedigger in times of oil counter-shock.

These "discomforts" of the rentier state and its extractivist growth model are at the root of the popular uprising of the Hirak. This growth system favors the marginalization of young graduates - most of whom end up despairing, driven to mass unemployment, internal downgrading or "forced" emigration. As evidence, if any, of this collective resignation of the youth, the expatriation rate of graduates is abnormally high in relation to Algeria's per capita income. Yet the country has made significant progress in human development and education, with the largest increase in the human development index between 1970 and 2010. According to World Bank data³, total health spending as a percentage of GDP increased from 3% in 1995 to 7.5% in the mid-2010s. Meanwhile, public spending on higher education doubled between 2000 (1.2%) and 2010 (2.5%). The enrollment rate in higher education thus grew by 10-15% annually in the 2000s, and increased by almost 12% from 31% to 43% between 2011 and 2016, catching up with the world average (Mouhoud, 2020, p. 162). Despite the significant mobilized funding, there is still a worrying structural deterioration in the quality of education and the health system. In other words, describing this "Algerian social state model" as successful is no more than a static illusion, with little concrete effect on reality.

³ <https://donnees.banquemondiale.org/>

| Wealthy country, pauperized populations

As mentioned earlier, since the end of the 1990s, Algeria has experienced a long period of financial ease following the surge in hydrocarbon prices on the international market. Thanks to this huge financial mass generated by the sale of its energy resources, Algeria quickly recovered its commercial and budgetary balances, paid off its foreign debt in advance and managed to build up a comfortable financial bolster that is close to \$200 billion in foreign exchange reserves. In its relations with the major powers, this relative financial ease, combined with the improvement in security conditions and post-September 11, 2001 geopolitical changes, gives the country significant room for maneuver and a large degree of autonomy in its decisions vis-à-vis the capitalist center.

The State's disengagement from the end of the 1980s, in addition to the security crisis of the 1990s, has largely contributed to the general impoverishment and deterioration of the living conditions of large parts of society, as well as to an abysmal backlog in terms of infrastructure and public facilities. Under the pressure of growing social demand, which was expressed in a long cycle of riots and social protests starting in the early 2000s (Larabi, 2010), the government launched several economic recovery programs. With an overall expenditure of about \$1000 billion, the economic recovery support plan (PSRE 2002/2004), the complementary growth support plan (PCSC 2005/2009), and the third and fourth five-year public investment programs (for the periods 2010-2014 and 2015-2019 respectively), are worthy of a mini Marshall Plan. It is true that these recovery plans have allowed for a relative improvement in Algerians' standard of living, but the delays accumulated during the (lost) decade of the 1990s and, above all, the accelerated pace of social change have not made it possible to satisfy the considerable needs and expectations that have arisen among the population.

The multiplication of protest movements in the world of work, in the cities and countryside of the country, is indicative of the social stagnation that reigns in the country. Social protest has even reached the south of the country, where populations are known for their rather

"calm" character, to the point where its inhabitants have ended up joining the popular riots⁴ that have become a "national sport". In addition, it should be noted that there is a close link between social protest and the financial improvement of the country at that time, because from the point of view of the protester, the State or employer (public or private) has the means to respond favorably to the demands of the people or the groups of workers (Djabi, 2020). The social movement that best expresses this paradox is most certainly that of the unemployed in the Algerian Sahara. It is indeed an interesting illustration of this phenomenon of social turmoil and ambivalent relations between State and society (Belakhdar, 2015). More importantly, these protest movements in the south of the country between 2004 and 2017 can be a representative sample of the experience of Algerians from the lower social strata. Indeed, these protest movements initially centered around the issue of employment posed by the movement of the unemployed in the South, are gradually associated with the issue of local development, the environmental issue (shale gas) and the issue of national sovereignty (Belakhdar, 2015). We consider that this case alone embodies this denunciation of structural marginality endured by entire sections of society, whether in urban or rural areas, in the North or the South. The leading slogans of this movement, such as "Oppressed and dispossessed citizens in the country of gas and oil" or "A poor people in a wealthy country", still ring in the ears of millions of the "left-behind" in Algeria. The slogan "Mahgourin fi bled el pétrole"⁵, literally "Marginalized in the land of oil", shows that there is a real will in this movement to represent all the downtrodden on a national scale.

Ultimately, the Hirak is a movement that certainly expresses political demands, crystallized in all the slogans denouncing the corruption and mismanagement that plague the state apparatus, and explicitly calling for the departure of the "system", but it also expresses an increasingly heavy economic and social malaise. It is thus the expression of a deep economic and social stagnation.

⁴ On these protest movements in southern Algeria, read the articles by Naoual Belakhdar, from the Free University of Berlin (Freie Universität Berlin) on the riots and the movement of the unemployed in Algeria.

⁵ "Mahgourin" actually comes from the word "Hogra", which means - in Algerian and North African Arabic dialect - any form of injustice, contempt and abuse of power.

tion, revealed by the omnipresence of slogans denouncing social inequalities, multiple injustices (hogra), institutionalized contempt, arbitrariness and the feeling of

Myth of the purchase of social peace

There is a persistent belief among important segments of society, analysts and social actors, that every social measure taken by the government is implicitly aimed at buying social peace, sweeping aside the corrosive effect on power of the many social and cultural struggles that have been waged since the early 2000s. Other analysts have claimed that the social movements were mainly "economic and social" in nature, as if to remove their political significance and thus "exonerate" the government. But what could be more "political" than social and economic issues, especially under an authoritarian regime, which is totally locked in and whose actors at all levels, from the top to local clientele, monopolize or misappropriate public wealth?

This type of discourse unfortunately contributes to the stigmatization of those who daily struggle for the improvement of living and working conditions, and who are pejoratively described as "digestive tracts". Of course, the wager of the authoritarian regime has always been based on a simple equation: "as long as there is something to redistribute, as long as economic growth ensures an increase in living standards, political stability will be ensured and the desire for protest will be contained" (Belguidoum, 2020, p. 40). However, since the beginning of the 2000s, the opposite has been true, as shown by the growing number of strikes and social protests every year during the period of financial ease (2001-2014). The few "measures" taken by the local and central authorities in response to the protests of the population fell far short of the demands and expectations of the protesters.

Moreover, in order to understand the objective reasons that led to the eruption of the movement, it is essential to recall the importance of the social movements that marked the two decades prior to the outbreak of the Hirak. Indeed, contrary to the clichés of a submissive and resigned population, social protest has never ceased in Algeria, even if it has remained fragmented and atomized due to the constant undermining work of the security apparatus to prevent/phagocytize any hint of autonomous organization (Mehtoul, 2018). From then on, from the beginning of the 2000s onwards, multiform

non-recognition of one's rights; in a word, everything that is part of the symbolic violence of daily life.

protests were expressed most often outside the existing frameworks - subjugated or neutralized by the authoritarian police regime - notably through violent riots or road blockades - thus contrasting with the dark decade of the 1990s, marked by generalized violence where everyone's main concern was to ensure their day-to-day survival.

Throughout the 2010s, political and social life in Algeria has been punctuated by countless riots or spontaneous popular uprisings that have spared no part of the national territory. Particularly in 2010, the phenomenon seems to have reached its peak, with riots exceeding a thousand (Bennadji, 2011). During the last decade, multiform public demonstrations have multiplied, concurrently with the emergence of new forms of civil society organizations. Virtually all categories of populations, including retired army and police officers, have organized marches, sit-ins or strikes during this period. Paradoxically, it is not the elected assemblies that are organized regularly, but rather "the 'burned tire' that is now perceived as 'intermediation' between the conflicting actors" (Tlemçani, 2019, p. 272). In this regard, in a relevant study on the protest movement in the Algerian South, the researcher Naoual Belakhdar proposes an overcoming of "the deterministic logic of the rentier state paradigm and to apprehend the normative framework underlying the protest" (Belakhdar, 2015, p. 28). In her view, however, we are rather in a situation of permanent renegotiation of the terms of the social contract.

During the 2000s, social movements were marked by their correlation with the persistence of a social stagnation, despite the financial relief achieved with the surge in oil prices from 2001 onwards, which is manifested daily in unemployment, poor living conditions, the problem of housing, access to water, gas and electricity, and the problems of road, hospital and school infrastructures; in a word, everything that contributes to making life worth living. These dysfunctions reveal both the multiple injustices of the "public decision-makers" and their prodigious incompetence to ensure, despite financial ease, a basic functioning of public services. However, it

must be noted that the Algerian protest environment has evolved qualitatively after 2011, aiming at participation in the life of the city, as the anti-shale gas movement or that of the graduates/unemployed in the South, or by expressing demands for more freedoms, social justice, dignity, rejection of hogra, recognition of rights or identities based on culture, local, social or religious belonging. Let us also note the appearance during this pivotal period of new forms of reappropriation of the public space by civil society, with literary cafés, intellectual debates or cultural festivals.

In the end, contrary to some superficial representations, Algeria has never been an unresponsive or rather content society. The Algerian Hirak did not come out of the blue, either: the revolts and multifaceted social movements throughout the years 2000 and 2010 were slow and silent accumulations that forged a new collective

consciousness and finally crystallized to give birth to this popular, unprecedented movement in the history of independent Algeria. Henceforth, the Hirak corresponds to a moment of maturity of the Algerian protest environment, despite the meeting, since long, of the objective conditions of an insurrection - with the incredible mismanagement and immorality of the ruling class; the rapine, the corruption and the hogra set up as a mode of governance... - that was delayed only by the fear of a new tilt in widespread violence. This fear was one of the major elements of the propaganda narrative of the authoritarian regime, an implicit threat to make society pay dearly for any hint of revolt or challenge to the established order.

Exacerbation of the social crisis as a result of the loss of government hegemony

It is undeniable that the multiple political crises at the top of the state, combined with the long cycle of social protests that the country has experienced since the early 2000s, have accelerated the weakening of the regime, as well as the gradual loss of its social base reconstituted with the coming to power of Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 1999. Indeed, the beginnings of this hegemony crisis started to appear during Bouteflika's second term. It was also expressed during the legislative elections of 2007. In these elections, despite the fraud, the participation rate did not exceed 35% and we had a government alliance that governed with less than 11% of the electorate. Five years later, in the 2012 legislative elections, the governmental alliance composed of FLN-RND-MPA collected only 21% of the votes cast, which represents 6% of the electorate estimated at more than 23 million voters. This process has become more evident over the years. The hegemony crisis is also expressed by the inability of the social bloc in power to regulate the internal contradictions that run through it and, by extension, its inability to find lasting solutions to the pressing social demands formulated by a society that aspires to access social progress.

For years, these classes and class factions which hold the State power have never been able to completely assert

their domination on the whole of the popular social classes and propose a coherent political alternative. From the perspective of Marxist analysis, political essayist Hocine Bellaloufi tries to explain this crisis of hegemony by this more or less latent war between the different Algerian bourgeoisie fractions. In his view, it is "this hegemonic incapacity of the two divisions of the bourgeoisie which is at the origin of the crisis of the regime, i.e. its incapacity to govern by being united and by obtaining the consent of the exploited and dominated. Therefore, the regime cannot be democratized. This crisis has been going on for years and was deepening. It has gained momentum during 2018" (Bellaloufi, 2019, p. 7).

The intensification of conflicts over the sharing of the rent - increasingly apparent, especially from 2014 onwards - between the different factions of the state-class and especially its inability to manage the issue of succession, are indicative of the weakening of its hegemonic power over society.⁶ Another notable fact is the large police demonstrations in the capital. No one ever imagined that "constituted bodies" would defy the ban and march on the Presidency. This unexpected event shows the beginning of a crack in the repressive apparatus of the state, which is a pillar of the authoritarian police regime in place since independence in 1962.

⁶ For an in-depth analysis of the evolution of the Algerian ruling class and its different segments since Independence, see Ouaisa (2010).

| The social question on the back burner

As mentioned above, the social issue has been at the heart of the protest movements that the country has experienced throughout the cycle that started in the 2000s. It was also one of the main reasons for the advent of the revolutionary process of February 2019, without necessarily being at the center of the demands; the slogans describing the painful conditions of the working classes and the precarious youth did not have sufficient political extensions. Thus, the multiple roadmaps proposed by the political elites and the various initiatives within the political coalitions, have focused mainly on political and institutional issues, with the notable exception of the initiative around the Pact of Democratic Alternative (PAD). The latter, which did include in its platform of demands the questioning of the economic and social order, did not, however, have a significant impact on the general orientations of the Hirak. As for the autonomous trade unions that mobilized within the framework of the Hirak, a certain number of them did indeed bring the workers' concerns to the public arena; however, these demands and expectations were quickly forgotten during the numerous meetings of political coalitions. In fact, the great absentee in the Hirak is the working class as a collective identity and social force. The

workers participate massively in the weekly demonstrations of the Hirak as well as in the strikes of the first months, though as citizens. This is also the case of the underprivileged youth, who represent the spearhead of the popular Hirak. It is also the case of young people in universities and colleges; few student coordinations have raised the issue of educational conditions, student life and their socio-professional future. In the absence of such a collective categorical consciousness among these large social groups, it is mainly the middle classes, essentially urban, that have taken on the task of expressing or translating, with their own aspirations, the demands of the Hirak. It is these middle classes, through social networks and mass media, that have essentially taken center stage as the political expression of the Hirak, according to their political representations and aspirations. For these middle classes, the social question in particular has to be relegated to the background and will be settled after the completion of the revolution. In the working classes, most people remain convinced that the advent of democracy will automatically settle the social question, thus ignoring the class antagonisms that are bound to resurface afterwards.

| Conclusion

The Algerian crisis and the advent of the Hirak in February 2019 are thus at the intersection of several political, economic and social factors. The objective of this contribution has been to understand the close articulation of these factors, without privileging one factor over another. We have therefore extended our approach and integrated the political, the economic and the social sides for a better understanding of the dynamics of society, in a political economy approach. This has allowed us to update a few keys in order to understand how and why the Hirak has taken on the forms and power that we know.

There will always be a part of mystery in the outbreak of a social movement, which may be long to occur even when the objective conditions are met. Nevertheless, there is a large part of slow and subterranean accumulation that sooner or later will bear fruit. However, the meeting of objective conditions does not automatically

determine the emergence of a large-scale protest movement, especially in the face of an authoritarian police regime and a population heavily traumatized by the 1990s civil war. And yet, despite the lack of autonomy and organization of civil society, the absence of any credible socio-political mediation and the fear of a new fall into generalized violence, a cataclysmic popular movement was finally unleashed in a totally unusual form of peaceful demonstrations throughout the country's cities. Far from being an accident of history or simply the result of a nth manipulation of power, we have shown that the advent of the Hirak crystallizes the sum of dynamics and social and cultural movements that have marked the two decades preceding its inception and therefore corresponds historically to a moment of maturity of the Algerian protest environment.

Today, the return to high-handed practices initiated by the new re-composition of the regime around Abdelmajid Taboun runs the risk, in the current socio-economic and political situation, of being counter-productive, even dangerous for the stability of a country where "social powder kegs" are smoldering, fuelled by the disappointments and frustrations of the post-Hirak marches. The proof is in the regime's inability to get society to adhere to its normalization project. The mediocre scores achieved during the various elections since 2019 reveal quite clearly that the regime has lost both its hegemony and its social base.

The latest desperate attempts to consolidate itself before the next presidential elections consist, on the one hand, of a wish to replace the existing political class with "civil society" and, on the other, of a return to the policy of oil rent distribution. Indeed, an analysis of the post-Hirak economic policy clearly shows the regime's desire to create a new social base through the massive distribution of the rent, particularly through salary increases in the civil service and the institution of allowances to benefit the young unemployed. This course is again confirmed by the Finance Law for 2023, which remains the largest in terms of budgetary allocations since independence.

References

- Allam S. (2019). 34e vendredi : le Hirak dit non au démantèlement de la souveraineté économique de l'Algérie. In <https://www.tsa-algerie.dz/34e-vendredi-le-hirak-dit-non-au-demantelement-de-la-souverainete-economique-de-lalgerie/>.
- Belakhdar, N. (2015). « L'éveil du Sud » ou quand la contestation vient de la marge : Une analyse du mouvement des chômeurs algériens. *Politique africaine*, 137, 2748. <https://doi.org/10.3917/polaf.137.0027>
- Belakhdar, N. (2019). « L'Indépendance, c'est maintenant ! » Réflexion sur le soulèvement populaire en Algérie. *L'Année du Maghreb*, 21, Art. 21. <https://doi.org/10.4000/anneemaghreb.5280>
- Belalloufi, H. (2019, mars 7). Algérie : D'une crise de régime à une crise politique. *CONTRETEMPS, Revue de critique communiste*. <https://www.contretemps.eu/read-offline/20332/algerie-crise-regime.pdf>
- Belguidoum, S. (2020). Hirak et crise du système néopatrimonial en Algérie : Rupture générationnelle et nouvelle temporalité historique. *Insaniyat / إنسانيات. Revue algérienne d'anthropologie et de sciences sociales*, 88, Art. 88. <https://doi.org/10.4000/insaniyat.23528>
- Benderra, O., Gèze, F., Lebdjaoui, R., & Mellah, S. (Éds.). (2020). *Hirak en Algérie : L'invention d'un soulèvement*. Paris : La Fabrique éditions.
- Bennadji, C. (2011). Algérie 2010 : L'année des mille et une émeutes. *L'Année du Maghreb*, VII, Art. VII. <https://doi.org/10.4000/anneemaghreb.1254>
- Kadri, A. (Éd.). (2019). *Algérie, décennie 2010 : Aux origines du mouvement populaire du 22 février*. Vulaines sur Seine : Éditions du Croquant.
- Larabi S. (2010). Algérie : Impuissance des mouvements populaires. *Alternatives Sud - État des résistances dans le Sud*, Vol. XVI 2009/4. <https://www.cetri.be/Algerie-impuissance-des-mouvements>
- Mebtoul, M. (2018). *Algérie, la citoyenneté impossible ?* Alger : Koukou Editions.
- Mebtoul, M. (2020). *Libertés, dignité, algérianité : Avant et pendant le Hirak*. Paris : L'Harmattan et Koukou Editions.
- Ministère de l'Industrie et des Mines, (2019). *Bulletin d'information statistique de la PME*, n° 35, 1^{er} semestre 2019. https://www.mipmepi.gov.dz/IMG/pdf/Bulletin_PME_N_35_vf.pdf
- Mouhoud, E. M. (2020). L'économie politique du soulèvement algérien : Quelles perspectives pour la transition économique ? *Mouvements*, n° 102(2), 157. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mouv.102.0157>
- Ouaissa, R. (2010). *La class-État algérienne 1962-2000 : Une histoire du pouvoir algérien entre sous-développement, rente pétrolière et terrorisme*. Paris : Publisud.
- Ouchichi, M. (2014). *Les fondements politiques de l'économie rentière en Algérie*. Bejaia : [Declic Editions](#).
- Rebah, A. (2021). *Algérie post-Hirak, à la conquête de l'avenir*. Alger : APIC.
- Selmane, A. (2020). Une insurrection qui n'est pas tombée du ciel. In Benderra, O., Gèze, F., Lebdjaoui, R., & Mellah, S. (Éds.). *Hirak en Algérie : L'invention d'un soulèvement* (pp. 79-91). Paris : La Fabrique éditions.
- Sidi Boumedine, R. (2019). *Aux sources du Hirak*. Alger : Chihab Éditions.
- Tlemçani, R. (2019). Les réformes politiques du printemps arabe : verrouillage et atomisation de l'espace public. In Kadri, A. (Éd.). *Algérie, décennie 2010 : Aux origines du mouvement populaire du 22 février* (pp. 269-295). Vulaines sur Seine : Éditions du Croquant.

EXTRACTIVISM

| The Project

The collaborative research project ***extractivism.de*** links the Universities of Kassel and Marburg. The project scrutinizes the extractivist development model and proposes new economic, political, and sociological conceptions of extractivism. It preliminarily focuses on Latin America and the Maghreb patterns. The project researches the conditions under which these patterns affect the persistence and transformative capacity of extractivism and its respective institutional settings. Finally, it explores how extractivism affects cultural processes and habitual routines and questions under what conditions and how far the development model extends into institution-building and social practice, i.e., everyday life.

The project aims to understand extractive societies not as deviants from the Western trajectory of development but in their own logic and their own particularities. The project, therefore, combines a strong empirical focus with theoretical work. It links both broad field research and data gathering of primary data and the qualitative and quantitative analysis of available secondary sources with a stringent transregional comparison. It develops methods in cross-area studies and investigates whether and why similar patterns of social change emerge in different areas and world regions despite significant cultural, social, or religious differences. Finally, the project intends to translate the findings for politics, society, and development cooperation.

Please visit www.extractivism.de for further information.

GEFÖRDERT VOM



U N I K A S S E L
V E R S I T Ä T

