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*How have the intertwined questions of land tenure, social conflict, land reform and food security played out in Algeria since the 19th century, and against the backdrop of changing development paradigms?*

By Caroline FRECHARD

Paris School of International Affairs, Sciences Po  
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Food Security in international politics

Professor Eckart Woertz

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**How have the intertwined questions of land tenure, social conflict, land reform and food security played out in Algeria since the 19th century, and against the backdrop of changing development paradigms?**

Frécharde Caroline

Paris School of International Affairs

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## Introduction:

“And the fact is, I saw worse.

I knew that cardoon stem constituted one of the basic kabyle foods. I had checked it throughout the region. But what I did not know is that, last year, five little Kabyles from the Abbo region died after having absorbed venomous stems. I knew that grain distribution did not suffice to make the Kabyls live. But I did not know that they were making them die and that, this winter, four old women coming from a faraway douar up to Michelet to get barley died in the snow on the way back. And everywhere is the same. In Adni, out of six hundred children attending the classes, forty might eat their fill...”<sup>1</sup>

When in 1939, Albert Camus wrote a series of articles on the misery in Kabylie, very few knew about the dramatic consequences of the 1938 drought in terms of food availability for the native algerian population. Even though we have few data on the famine threat that year, reports of the exclusion of many Algerians from the colonial economy, as well as their vulnerability towards droughts or other natural events, help us to understand why food security became a top priority, at least in the rhetoric, for the leaders of the independent Algeria. Also, the poverty of many Algerians explain the independence-leaders emphasis on redistribution politics. Yet, in 2014 and even though Algeria undergoes a nutritional transition, meaning that its major problem in terms of food security is not food shortage anymore but unvaried diets, risk factors related to its food-security remain and resemble those at the roots of the misery during colonial times.

For instance, Algeria is still vulnerable to droughts and, in an economy today globalized, its population remains vulnerable to shifts in commodity prices. Hence, when in 2011 riots broke out in the country, partly due to the high price of sugar and cooking oil, the government responded with the reduction of import taxes on these two goods in a first time, before thinking up a new strategy for food security. Published in 2010, the strategy was designed to boost domestic production through a variety of programs including farmers in rural and low-income areas. At the same time, it aimed at reducing the uncertainties of rain-fed agriculture, by adding 0.5 million hectares to the current 1.1 million currently irrigated by 2014 and at developing the Algerian infrastructures<sup>2</sup>, which reflect the country's will to reach a greater independency. What can be striking is that all those measures, aiming at improving the Algerian food security through modernization or a greater self-sufficiency, had already been encouraged at the dawn of its independence. Yet, a series of

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<sup>1</sup> CAMUS, Albert, *Misère de la Kabylie*, *Alger Républicain*, 5 au 15 juin 1939

<sup>2</sup> COLEMAN, Callie D., *Algeria Food Security*, Borgen Project, August 27, 2013

historical, sociological and political factors stopped, or accelerated their implementation.

***How have the intertwined questions of land tenure, social conflict, land reform and food security played out since the 19th century against the backdrop of changing development paradigms?***

This essay aims at explaining the forces determining Algerian food politics, and how the changing development paradigms influenced its food policies. After analyzing the failure of the redistributive socialist policies to ensure food availability (I), we will analyze to what extent liberal reforms can help developing a state where clientelism remains a strong feature of the economy(II).

**I. Striving for food self-sufficiency (from the independence to 1978)**

**A. Food policies in the colonial times**

**1) A two-sided economy**

According to the historians Martin Evans and John Philipps, the colonization of Algeria was a catastrophe in terms of food security. From its inception by the General Bugeaud, for who “wherever there is fresh water and fertile land, there one must locate colons, without concerning oneself to who this land belongs”<sup>3</sup>, the conquest of Algeria was to be brutal and to create a two-sided economy.

The French politics in Algeria, first, liberalized in a large extent the Algerian economy. In 1873, the Warnier law split up the land communally held into individual lots so that they can be sold more easily. The French authorities claimed that it would in the long term benefit Algeria, by opening the way for free trade, yet in practice it was only an “all-out” land-grab: between 1871 and 1898, the French settlers acquired one million hectares of land.

The two-sided economy was characterized by the fact that the settlers held most of the best, irrigated land (2, 350, 000 hectares<sup>4</sup>) and about one-half of the cultivated area<sup>5</sup> where, using the latest agricultural techniques, they produced wine and food for exports. On the other side, Algerian peasantry who were forced to maintain a subsistence economy based on archaic methods.

Poverty and hunger are linked: because of their expropriation, hunger was part of everyday life for native Algerians. When France was hit very hard by the Great Depression in the 30s, the metropole

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3 Cited in EVANS, Martins and PHILIPPS, John, *Algeria, Anger of the dispossessed*, Yale University Press, 2008

4 EVANS, Martins and PHILIPPS, John, *Algeria, Anger of the dispossessed*, Yale University Press, 2008

5 METZ, Helen Chapan, *Algeria: A Country Study*, GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994

made the choice to protect the settler's interests, further intensifying the pauperization of the population, which triggered a huge exodus of landless peasants from the interior to the major coastal cities. This great displacement of the population climaxed tragically with the 1937 famine, widely remembered among North African populations as a terrible year of hunger, when people literally dropped dead of starvation on the roadside. Even though some of the local authorities did introduce relief measures, others sent victims back to their places of origin, partly because some of them believed that Muslim Algerians, following a primitive way of life, were bound to extinction<sup>6</sup>.

## **2) Economy politics in the view of the independence leaders**

This way of life was unable to cope with the dramatic rise in population, which tripled in Algeria between 1856 and 1940 to 6,5 million, due in a way to the impact of French medicine reducing infant mortality<sup>7</sup>.

Even though the ultimate aim of the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN), a merger of smaller independents groups to become the Algerian ruling clique, was the independence of Algeria, a closer look at their 1954 proclamation gives one the intuition that the algerian economic policies would never be the same once the French would have departed: their stated goal is "the restoration of the Algerian state, sovereign, democratic, and *social*, within the framework of the principles of Islam" and their internal objectives a "political house-cleaning through the destruction of the last vestiges of corruption and reformism". Finally, they said that they accepted a dialog with the French, under the condition of "an official declaration abrogating all edicts, decrees, and laws by virtue of which Algeria was "French soil"<sup>8</sup>. Between 1966 and 1971, the oil sector and all other foreign concerns were totally nationalized.

### **B. The new Algerian food politics**

#### **1) The socialist economy...**

\* At the independence, Algeria had been devastated: more than 1 million Algerians, mostly peasants, died and over 2 million rural Algerians were uprooted and forced into detention camps to create free-fire zones in the countryside. Hundreds of villages were destroyed, cropland and forests napalmed and burned, and livestock perished by the millions. The destruction of agrarian Algeria was compounded by the fact that many of the approximately 22,000 colonial farmers severely

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<sup>6</sup> EVANS, Martins and PHILIPPS, John, *Algeria, Anger of the dispossessed*, Yale University Press, 2008

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Annex 1: FLN, *Proclamation of the Algerian National Front, Liberation Front*, November, 1954

neglected their holdings during the war. At war's end, most abruptly abandoned their farms. Some four fifths of this abandoned farmland produced wheat and barley, Algeria's major food crops<sup>9</sup>. Given this destruction, explains Will Swearingen, one of Algeria's most pressing problems at independence was simply feeding itself.

\* The Boumediene government took over for its own use farms vacated by the French (around expropriated 2.7 million hectares), and legalized its action in 1963, when the authorities decreed that all land abandoned by the colons would be owned by the state. By mid-1966 however, a small portion of farmland had been occupied by Algerians claiming to be previous owners, as well as by laborers who had worked for the colons. In 1971, Boumediene announced the dissolution of the state-owned farming sector and introduced an agrarian reform program which broke up large state-owned farms and redistributed them to landless peasants, who received almost all of the funds allocated to agriculture at the condition that they join government-organized cooperatives which would provide them with state loans, seed, fertilizers, and agricultural equipment<sup>10</sup>. "Self-management" was Boumediene's first strategy for meeting the country's food needs; however, it remained under a socialist control (between 1963 and 1966, the 22,000 self-managed farms were consolidated into approximately 2,000 large state farms<sup>11</sup>) and has been dropped by Boumediene with his agrarian revolution.

\* The centrality of agriculture policies and the strive to achieve food self-sufficiency, as well as the choice of a socialist economic model, are a direct consequence of the exclusion and ignorance of many Algerians who lived in poverty during the colonial period. Boumediene himself came from an impoverished background, and, having been raised by a father who spoke no French and eked out a living growing wheat<sup>12</sup>, understood the importance of soil for the Algerian people. By early 1974, Boumediene's agrarian revolution (1974-78) had given ten hectares of private land to each of 60,000 peasants and had organized them into 6,000 agricultural cooperatives<sup>13</sup>.

Also, Algeria went very far in following the Egyptian economic model, which aimed at industrializing the country especially with substituting imports<sup>14</sup>.

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9 SWEARINGEN, Will, *Algeria's Food Security Crisis*, Middle East Research and Information project, volume 166

10 METZ, Helen Chapan, *Algeria: A Country Study*, GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994

11 SWEARINGEN, Will, *Algeria's Food Security Crisis*, Middle East Research and Information project, volume 166

12 EVANS, Martins and PHILIPPS, John, *Algeria, Anger of the dispossessed*, Yale University Press, 2008

13 METZ, Helen Chapan, *Algeria: A Country Study*, GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994

14 LACROIX, Stephane, *The political sociology of the Arab State*, Fall Semester seminar, Sciences Po. Paris School of International Affairs, 2013

## 2) ... and the rentier state

\* Even though the army and FLN-led revolution recognized private property, they also paid, as we have seen, a close attention to redistribution. A mistrust towards the private sector, which belong to the bourgeoisie during colonial times and the will to cut the ties to Europe, remained until today: the Algerian hydrocarbon sector, which accounts for 98% of the country's exports and 50% of its GDP, is still largely dominated by the public group Sonatrach, which possesses 43% of the Algerian mining fields<sup>15</sup>. Today, hydrocarbons still are the backbone of the economy: Algeria has the 10th-largest reserves of natural gas in the world and is the sixth-largest gas exporter<sup>16</sup>.

Sonatrach had been created in 1963 with the view of mobilizing the resources from the oil rent, perceived very early as a motor element in the development of Algeria. But how legitimate the self-centered economic policies of the algerian authorities could have been, the development model of Algeria also comported important flaws. Indeed, Algeria became a semi-rentier state.

\* The rentier state theory has been developed by Giacomo Luciani for who "economic realities condition the total resources that any single state structure can muster; a state structure tends to be stable if it commands sufficient resources to guarantee its own survival"<sup>17</sup>. States disposing from large oil resources might become rentiers, because of the very special nature of oil. Indeed, oil does not require the mobilization of large numbers of the population. Quite to the contrary, it is a highly automated business, in which few are employed and a relatively high percentage of those few are specialized full-time labour. Being of no immediate interest (unlike water) for the survival of the population, oil revenue enables the consumer however, to buy a wide array of goods, including oil-derived products. In such situations, the state will play the role of a mediator between the oil production and the consumer's interests <sup>18</sup>.

The richness of Algeria in oil and gas explain why this state became a semi-rentier state, as well as its economic politics of redistribution. According to Luciani and Beblawi, rentier states can function according to a redistribution logic<sup>19</sup>, also called patrimonialism and where the authorities can buy the co-optation of their citizens. Hence, as long as the people think that the state ensures them economic security, they would not ask for political representation, especially because they barely

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15Annex 2, from MANDRAUD, Isabelle, *Les cinq visages d'Abdelaziz Bouteflika: la rente*, Le Monde, 16 avril 2014

16 CIA World Factbook: *Algeria*

17 LUCIANI, Giacomo, *The Arab State*, edited by Luciani Giacomo, 1990

18 LUCIANI, Giacomo, *The Arab State*, edited by Luciani Giacomo, 1990

19 BEBLAWI, Hazem and LUCIANI, Giacomo, *The rentier state*, Croom Helm, 1987

pay taxes. In a sense, this model matches the slogan “no representation without taxation”.

Oil rents, transiting through state-owned enterprises that controlled close to 80% of the whole algerian economy<sup>20</sup>, were invested in rapid growth via far-reaching development projects. They were earmarked, as well, for the provision of extensive social insurance: free, universal education and health care, as well as subsidized food and public transportation.

This clientelist system emerged, Evans and Philipps claim, even before the independence, at the inception of the FLN. Indeed, its six administrative areas, the *wilayas*, operated independently and were composed more of clientelist networks fighting for empowerment within the FLN than caring about the effective development of Algeria<sup>21</sup>.

## **II. The disillusion of a “rentier” state (1978- today)**

### **A. Oil for food?**

#### **1) The riskiness of choosing oil as unique food-security strategy**

\* The state's revenue, however, did not come from the only oil, but also from abandoned colonial property, which was soon to be consumed.

In 1973, the first oil price shock shown the absolute necessity to diversify the Algerian state's revenues if it wanted to continue its massive redistribution politics. With the spectacular growth in rents that accompanied the shock, Boumediene became euphoric about the possibilities offered by these new revenues: he distributed huge subsidies to the state owned enterprises so that they can implement his most grandiose projects, while meeting his planners requests for a suppression of audits. But many problems accompanied this heavy industrialization: the severe economic distortions involved in the abandonment of market relations for a type of planning which paid little attention to cost and price were soon revealed<sup>22</sup>.

Also, the agrarian reform program, which forced peasants into cooperatives without incentives for productivity could not keep in pace with the rapid growth of the Algerian population and its consequent raising demand for food. The exploding “food gap”<sup>23</sup> of the 1970s led to a growing realization that the policy of inward-looking development was incapable of generating the revenues required to pay for imports and to finance an ever-expanding welfare state. Because Algeria was

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20 LOWI, Miriam R., *Oil Wealth and the Poverty of Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2009

21 EVANS, Martins and PHILIPPS, John, *Algeria, Anger of the dispossessed*, Yale University Press, 2008

22 OWEN, Roger, *State, Power, and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Routledge, 2007

23 RICHARDS, Alan et WATERBURY, John, *a political economy of the middle east*, Westview Press, 2008



confronted to greater demands than it could accommodate, then it gradually turned from an allocation into a production state<sup>24</sup>. Algerian leaders knew that they could not rely solely on the diminishing oil as a rent (the Algerian hydrocarbon revenue, including gas, accounted for an always smaller share of its total revenue: 67% in 1981, 53% in 1984 while government spending that year was 84, 8% of its GDP<sup>25</sup>).

Moreover, oil is mostly utilized abroad, which means that it has value only to the extent that it is exported. Hence the authorities knew that it was risky to imagine that oil prices would ever be stable and guarantee food security, which is the only reason why Algerian citizens accept not to participate to the political life of their state.

\* To continue to rule and to control the economy, the algerian regime faced no other choice than searching for another rent-source, while reorganizing its economy, to the extent that was possible in spite of clientelist networks impeaching the government to take economic decisions without the consent of many powerful actors. Within a cold war context in which South Yemen received at a point half of its GDP from the USSR and Egypt more than 2 billions dollars a year for having signed a peace treaty with Israel, huge profits were to be expected from siding to one or the other block. Hence, it was less for the political convictions of its leaders than for the will to remain in power and fuel their rentier system than Algerian leaders decided to liberalize and privatize their economy in the early 80s when increasing joblessness and poverty made it more difficult for the efficiency discourse to justify authoritarianism. In exchange of the loans necessary to meet the growing foreign exchange crisis (the international indebtedness of Algeria had increased during the recession following the oil shock), the World Bank demanded the adoption by the receiving countries of structural adjustment packages.

## **2) The abandon of the socialist economy: regime searching rent desperately**

\* As a follow-up to the Egyptian *infitah* (opening) announced by Sadate in 1974 and to Boumediene's death in 1978, Algeria under the presidency of Chadli Benjedid orchestrated a challenge to "socialist" planning, because it sought the IMF help to provide part of its rent. The five-year plan 1980-4, strongly criticized the focus on heavy industry run by large and inefficient public sector organizations and called for an administrative decentralization, for a greater attention

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24 BEBLAWI, Hazem and LUCIANI, Giacomo, *The rentier state*, Croom Helm, 1987

25 BEBLAWI, Hazem and LUCIANI, Giacomo, *The rentier state*, Croom Helm, 1987

to light industry and special encouragements to the private sector<sup>26</sup>. By 1985, 700000 hectares of former agrarian revolution land were privatized and since 1987, the government has gradually been converting the *domaines agricoles socialistes* into smaller autonomous units known as *exploitations agricoles collectives* (EACs)<sup>27</sup>. Also, since 1980 has been extending credit to the private sector, which accounts for some 80 percent of Algeria's farmers and 60 percent of the country's agricultural land<sup>28</sup>. Along with privatization, the government decided to allocate more public funds to agricultural infrastructure, especially dam construction and water projects<sup>29</sup>. It established a plan for increasing the cultivated areas in Algeria (2 more million hectares), which stills reflect a will to reach a greater independency, as in this semi-rentier state model, food security is the utmost factor of regime's stability.

\* However, the economic reforms were far to ensure the full adoption of liberalism.

According to Ghassan Salamé, Algeria could be understood as a “weak”, however “solid” state<sup>30</sup>. This means that the Algerian state had few decisive power, including in what concerns the economy. Furthermore, it is “solid” because it had a cohesive core: any decision has to be approved by this core, composed mainly of generals and officers from the intelligence and the army, who will not confront themselves very violently within the system, for their common aim is for the regime not to fall. A good reflect of the decision-process are the attempts by Mouloud Hamrouche, the algerian Prime Minister in 1989, who decided to launch, in coherence with the expectations of the Algerian population, a series of economic policies to develop the country. Because those policies required a greater efficacy, hence a greater transparency in fiscal matters and so, worried high level political leaders, Hamrouche became the target of disinformation campaigns by the DRS<sup>31</sup> (algerian intelligence services, at the core of the algerian system). He finally had to resign: his failure demonstrates the pregnancy of the “deep” and pervasive algerian state, as well as the difficulty to implement any economic reform in Algeria<sup>32</sup>.

Even though the liberal policies aimed at developing the private sector and hence, help the country to develop, Algeria still experienced a huge economic crisis which the adoption of the IMF standards and austerity politics made worst on the short term. As Owen reminds: “experience in Britain and elsewhere has shown, there are complex problems involved in preparing state-owned

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26 OWEN, Roger, *State, Power, and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Routledge, 2007

27 SWEARINGEN, Will, *Algeria's Food Security Crisis*, Middle East Research and Information project, volume 166

28 SWEARINGEN, Will, *Algeria's Food Security Crisis*, Middle East Research and Information project, volume 166

29 METZ, Helen Chapan, *Algeria: A Country Study*, GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994

30 LUCIANI, Giacomo, *The Arab State*, edited by Luciani Giacomo, 1990

31 YAD, Hamid, *Mouloud Hamrouche parle du rendez-vous du 30 mai*, El Khabar, June 8, 2002

32 WILLIS, Michael, *Politics and Power in the Maghrib*, Hurst Publishers, 2012

companies for sale, including the need to reduce workforce, clear unsold inventories...”, as well as growth in unemployment, falling living-standards, inflation and an increased polarization between rich and poor, side effects which the Algerian population was not ready to accept easily.

\* Moreover, drought and a devastating locust invasion resulted in food shortages and the rise of the price of basic food necessities. Persuaded that food stocks were not empty but that the regime decided not to make it available, young Algerians started riots in October 1988, to which the Algerian regime responded with not only the introduction of renewed economic reforms but also with the adoption of pluralism and election: political representation was perceived by an important part of the regime as the only way to calm what happened to be the worst food/IMF riots of the Middle East<sup>33</sup>.

## **B. Food security and the regime's stability**

### **1) Commodity prices and their potential for riots**

\* The apparent multipartism was decided as a follow-up to the riots of 1988 and for two reasons: the Algerian regime did not expect islamists groups to score better than them in elections supposed to calm the population, and it was a way of attracting international investments. But even though the food/IMF riots of 1988 are often considered as an argument in favor of theories according to which food insecurity triggers unrest, the Algerian case is very specific.

Indeed, the regime did not tolerate the empowerment of dissident voices which threatened its survival. When, after cutting the state subsidies for the FIS, the Algerian authorities remarked that the Islamic party was still in control of many localities and could still exercise power thanks to the financial economy it enjoyed through donations, while some of the party called the FLN members “apostates”, the party began to be perceived as a danger by the Algerian leadership, who decided to prohibit it<sup>34</sup>. This led eventually to a civil war to be known later as *décennie noire*, which did not end before 2002. The civil war derailed the economic reforms, while the bloody struggle between islamists and the regime wrought great destructions while making it difficult to attract international investment outside the highly protected oil and gas sector<sup>35</sup>. A war, indeed, is rarely positive in terms of food security or economy... Nevertheless, even here the regime submitted itself to a four-year IMF program, 1994-8, in which it exchanged a promise of better budget discipline for help

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33 LACROIX, Stéphane, *The political sociology of the Arab State*, Fall Semester seminar, Sciences Po. Paris School of International Affairs, 2013

34 MARTINEZ, Luis, *the Algerian civil war 1990-1998*, Columbia University Press- CERI Sciences Po, 2000

35 OWEN, Roger, *State, Power, and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Routledge, 2007

with access to the international capital market<sup>36</sup>.

The trauma of the *décennie noire* makes would make it very unlikely for food insecurity to develop into mass protests. In 1988, the government restored the calm within a week, at the cost of dead numbered in hundreds and thousands wounded or imprisoned<sup>37</sup>.

\* Moreover, food security appears to have been improving over the past 30 years in Algeria, at least in terms of availability, which makes famines unlikely. Like its Maghreb neighbors, Algeria also experienced a nutritional transition: in terms of food policies, its main risks are not food shortages or problems of malnutrition anymore, but those related to obesity and cardiovascular diseases<sup>38</sup>. The problems of a non- varied diet are important: Algeria has the highest figure of obesity before five years old (9,2% compared to Morocco: 6,8 % and Tunisia: 3,5%), 9% of iodine deficiency, a high proportion of stunted children<sup>39</sup>...

Those problems of “hidden hunger”, how important they might be, seem less likely than food shortages to cause riots like in 1988. Moreover, even though oil is not a panacea for the regime, it continues to play a rent-role for the government, though at the earlier-mentioned extent. As Lowi argued in 2009, and after the global food crisis, the Algerian regime benefited from high-oil prices periods that helped it to further its clientelist practices of cooptation and manipulation, by distributing the rent in ways that fragment social formation and neutralize (potential) threats to its hegemony<sup>40</sup>. Hence, in spite of this crisis, Bouteflika used the vast hydrocarbon resources to step up the fight against what remained of the insurgency, but also to drown out demands for reform<sup>41</sup>. The hydrocarbon giants, Sonatrach and Sonelgaz, remain excluded from Algeria's feeble reforms towards liberalism.

\* But, if food shortages are unlikely to cause new riots, commodity prices might do. 2011 has given evidence that despite the trauma of the civil war, the Algerian people has a voice. Indeed, as a consequence of drought and forest fires in wheat-producer countries, food commodities prices jumped: the FAO indicia measuring the evolution of a basket containing cereals, oleaginous plants,

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36 OWEN, Roger, *State, Power, and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Routledge, 2007

37 ENTELIS, John P. and NAYLOR, Philip, *Algeria: State and Society in Transition*, Westview Press, 1990

38 BENJELLOUN, S., *Food Security Prospects in the Maghreb*, in *Environmental Challenges in the Mediterranean 2000–2050*, edited by Antonio Marquina Barrio

39 BENJELLOUN, S., *Food Security Prospects in the Maghreb*, in *Environmental Challenges in the Mediterranean 2000–2050*, edited by Antonio Marquina Barrio

40 LOWI, Miriam R., *Oil Wealth and the Poverty of Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2009

41 LOWI, Miriam R., *Oil Wealth and the Poverty of Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2009

dairy products, meat and sugar reached its highest in december with 214, 7 points, a score even higher than its 213, 5 points during the 2008 food crisis<sup>42</sup>. The fourth worldly wheat importer at the time<sup>43</sup>, Algeria has not been spared by the rise of food prices: cereals prices went up to 30% more<sup>44</sup>, meats and dairy products rose of 40% that year.

Especially to contest high prices of sugar and cooking oil, and in the Arab Spring context, people came to the streets: at a point more than 3000 Algerian demonstrated, a very high number if we consider the trauma of the civil war<sup>45</sup>.

## 2) Algerian food politics in 2014: back to self-sufficiency?

\* In response to the 2011 wave of economic protests, the Algerian government reduced the import taxes on these two goods, while offering more than \$23 billion in public grants and retroactive salary and benefits increase (moves that continue to weigh on public finances...<sup>46</sup>). Today, Algeria also heavily subsidizes key food items like flour and milk, that are estimated to amount to 1.1% of its GDP<sup>47</sup>. While the riots may have died down the country remains vulnerable to similar price spikes, and some bloggers like Essaï Wakli warns that the rise of dairy products in 2014, when the purchasing power of Algerians was already low, reminds of the 2011 situation and that this might anger the population<sup>48</sup>.

\* Even though there is common idea, when it comes to food security, that the future of the Middle East and of North Africa lies in nonagricultural development<sup>49</sup>, it would be difficult to defend this conclusion in the front of Algerian citizens paying the prices, especially if we agree with the “third food regime” view<sup>50</sup> which considers that agriculture has a strategic value and that, in a framework of volatile prices, reaching a certain level of independency might be necessary to ensure food security.

In 2010, the Algerian ministry of agriculture launched in 2010 a *politique de renouveau agricole et*

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42 REUTERS, *La hausse des prix alimentaires fait craindre des émeutes de la faim*, January 7, 2011

43 INDEX MUNDI, *Wheat imports* (Algeria is now 5<sup>th</sup> world wheat importer)

44 GUICHARD, Guillaume, *Algérie, Tunisie: les raisons économiques de la colère*, January 2011

45 MANDRAUD, Isabelle, Une société confrontée à de multiples paradoxes, Le Monde, Dossiers & Documents, April 2011

46 CIA World Factbook: *Algeria*

47 MALIK, Asmaa, *Algeria modernising agricultural sector and boosting food production*, Global Arab Network, 2013

48 WAKLI, Essaïd, *Vertigineuse hausse des prix: janvier 2014 ou l'étrange souvenir de janvier 2011*, Algérie Focus, January 5, 2014

49 RICHARDS, Alan et WATERBURY, John, *A political economy of the Middle East*, Westview Press, 2008

50 MC MICHAEL, Philip, *Historic Food Regimes and the Middle East*, in *Food Security and the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, 2013

*rural* (politic of agricultural and rural renewal, comprised in its 2010-2014 plan) and which goes in the opposite direction of the one defended above. The aim of this plan is to reduce the dependency of Algeria on food imports, as well as its vulnerability towards commodity prices, through a boost of the domestic production of basic food commodities like wheat or milk, in order to meet 75% of the country's needs at least<sup>51</sup>.

Aspects of this policy were a modernization of the methods of the agricultural administration or a reinforcement of human capacities and a technical support for producers<sup>52</sup>. This policy, at least on the paper, marks a shift with previous plans which put more arable lands into production and did not constitute a very sustainable development path.

Some programs consequent to the 2010-2014 plan have focused on public-private partnerships that help introduce modern farming practices among rural growers. These practices have helped increase agricultural output by 23 percent in 2011 and an additional 32 percent in 2012<sup>53</sup>. Algeria will also focus on developing its infrastructure. This will be a key component to affecting agricultural development in remote areas, which in a country of Algeria's size are significant. This component will also include development efforts to reduce post-harvest losses through storage and transportation modifications. Finally, the country wishes to increase its irrigated acres, adding 0.5 million hectares to the current 1.1 million currently irrigated by 2014<sup>54</sup>.

\* Hence, it seems that there is still some room for the modernization of the agricultural sector and especially since the civil war stopped the development of modern infrastructures, irrigation systems etc. the modernization of the agricultural sector and a consequent move towards less dependency might not be such a bad idea. Food self-sufficiency might be a "fading mirage"<sup>55</sup>, yet more independency may not: Algeria, still importing almost 70% of its wheat consumption already reduced this number by 8,5% between 2009 and 2010<sup>56</sup> (although Algerian wheat imports slightly increased between 2012 and 2013<sup>57</sup>) and increased its milk production from 390m liters in 2010 to 688m liters in 2012<sup>58</sup>...

Measuring to what extent the Algerian agricultural production can be increased is not the purpose of this essay; however a patriotic blogger calculated that over the last 10 years, the national production

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51 ALGERIAN Ministry of Agriculture, *La politique de renouveau agricole et rural en Algérie*, November 2010

52 ALGERIAN Ministry of Agriculture, *La politique de renouveau agricole et rural en Algérie*, November 2010

53 COLEMAN, Callie D., *Algeria Food Security*, Borgen Project, August 27, 2013

54 COLEMAN, Callie D., *Algeria Food Security*, Borgen Project, August 27, 2013

55 RICHARDS, Alan et WATERBURY, John, *A political economy of the Middle East*, Westview Press, 2008

56 ABURAWA, Arwa, *Algeria to boost its food security*, Green Prophet, April 12, 2011

57 *Food Security Snapshot: Algeria*, FAO, 2014 (see Annex 3)

58 MALIK, Asmaa, *Algeria modernising agricultural sector and boosting food production*, Global Arab Network, 2013

continually increased, by an average of 7% each year<sup>59</sup>. The value of agricultural output grew 23,7% in 2011 and a further 32% in 2012<sup>60</sup>. But at the same time, “although it is the largest country in Africa, only about 8.2m ha of its 2,381,740 sq km is arable, equivalent to 19.5% of agricultural land or 3.4% of total land area”...

## Conclusions:

Since the independence, food politics have been of the most important issues for Algerian leaders, whose regime stability depends largely of their capacity to provide their population with minimum living standards.

Realizing that the oil rent was not sufficient to achieve food security, Algerian leaders have implemented varied economic reforms targeting the agricultural sector, both with the aim of obtaining short-term economic help, like IMF credits, or with the aim of developing the country's production capacities in order to obtain a more long-lasting food security. Nevertheless, the implementation of reforms in the view of developing the country have been conditioned to the benefits which powerful businessmen, or state leaders, would retire from them. This condition has been defined by Daniel Brumberg as the “trap of liberalized autocracy”<sup>61</sup>, under which the new Algerian “democracy” of the 1990s would rather be a new form of authoritarianism where only little reforms sustaining the autocracy can succeed.

An external observer from the CIA gives the opinion that: “long-term economic challenges include diversifying the economy away from its reliance on hydrocarbon exports, bolstering the private sector, attracting foreign investments and providing adequate jobs for younger Algerians”<sup>62</sup>. Another mean of explaining that for developing the country and ensure that the population will not demonstrate against the regime, not only food security is to be provided, but also jobs for a younger population and perspectives for the future. Indeed, as the country underwent a nutritional transition, famines have become quite unlikely. However, diversifying diets remain a major issue, and the population's sensitivity to volatile food commodities prices have shown it.

Because even though it might be very difficult for Algeria to reach food self-sufficiency, oil is not a panacea neither. Rent redistribution allowed to delay the reforms in the 1970s, it allowed to delay

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59 HAMMOUCHE, Lahcène, , Monjournaldz.com, May 2013

60 MALIK, Asmaa, *Algeria modernising agricultural sector and boosting food production*, Global Arab Network, 2013

61 BRUMBERG, Daniel, *The trap of liberalized autocracy*, Journal of Democracy, volume 13 n°4, October 2002

62 CIA World Factbook: *Algeria*

them at the end of the civil war and until 2011, when the Algerian government offered billions dollars in public grants. Further developments only might give us hints about whether such a political system will be able to offer its citizens diversified diets and to implement the needed reforms for its economic development, or if it will increasingly face criticism up to the point that political change will be its only solution.



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## ANNEX 1

### ***Proclamation of the Algerian National Front, Liberation Front, (FLN) November, 1954***

After decades of struggle, the National Movement has reached its final phase of fulfilment. At home, the people are united behind the watchwords of independence and action. Abroad, the atmosphere is favourable, especially with the diplomatic support of our Arab and Moslem brothers. Our National Movement, prostrated by years of immobility and routine, badly directed was disintegrating little by little. Faced with this situation, a youthful group, gathering about it the majority of wholesome and resolute elements, judged that the moment had come to take the National Movement out of the impasse into which it had been forced by the conflicts of persons and of influence and to launch it into the true revolutionary struggle at the side of the Moroccan and Tunisian brothers. We are independent of the two factions that are vying for power. Our movement gives to compatriots of every social position, to all the purely Algerian parties and movements, the possibility of joining in the liberation struggle.

GOAL. National independence through:

the restoration of the Algerian state, sovereign, democratic, and social, within the framework of the principles of Islam;

the preservation of a fundamental freedoms, without distinction of race or religion.

INTERNAL Objective Political house-cleaning through the destruction of the last vestiges of corruption and reformism

EXTERNAL Objectives:

1. The internationalization of the Algerian problem;
2. The pursuit of North African unity in its national Arabo-Islamic context;
3. The assertion, through United Nations channels, of our active sympathy toward all nations that may support our liberating action.

MEANS OF STRUGGLE: Struggle by every means until our goal is attained. Exertion at home and abroad through political and direct action, with a view to making the Algerian problem a reality for the entire world. The struggle will be long, but the outcome is certain. To limit the bloodshed, we propose an honourable platform for discussion with the French authorities:

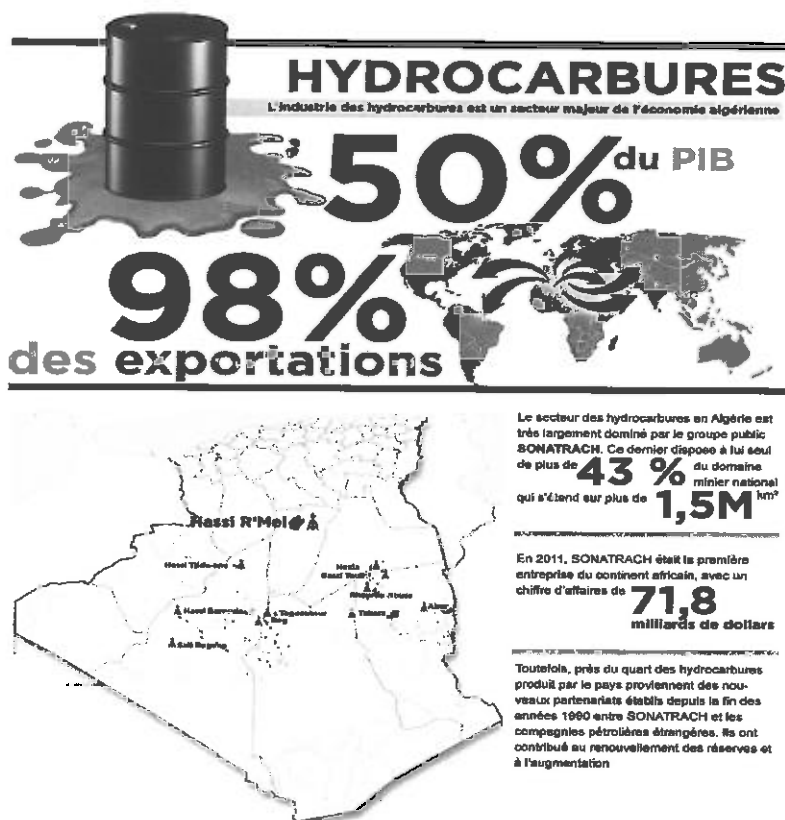
1. The opening of negotiations with the authorized spokesmen the Algerian people, on the basis of a recognition of Algerian sovereignty, one and indivisible.
2. The inception of an atmosphere of confidence brought about freeing all those who are detained, by annulling all measures exception, and by ending all legal action against the combatant forces.
3. The recognition of Algerian nationhood by an official declaration abrogating all edicts, decrees, and laws by virtue of which Algeria was "French soil."

In return for which:

1. French cultural and economic interests will be respected, as well as persons and families.
2. All French citizens desiring to remain in Algeria will be allowed to opt for their original nationality, in which case they will be considered as foreigners, or for Algerian nationality, in which case they will be considered as Algerians, equal both as to rights and as to duties.
3. The ties between France and Algeria will be the object of agreement between the two Powers on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

Algerians: The F. L. N. is your front; its victory is your victory. For our part, strong in your support, we shall give the best of ourselves to the Fatherland.

## ANNEX 2



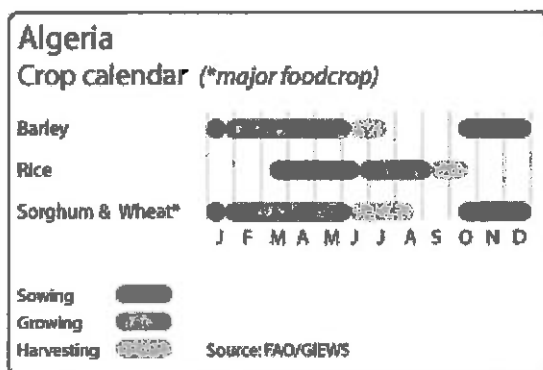
**RUSSIE**  
**ARABIE SAOUDITE**  
**ÉTATS-UNIS**  
**IRAN**  
**CANADA**  
**EAU ARABES UNIES**  
**MEXIQUE**  
**IRAK**  
**KOWEIT**  
**BRÉSIL**  
**NIGÉRIA**  
**VÉNÉZUELA**  
**NORVEGE**  
**ALGÉRIE**

**PAYS PRODUCTEURS DE PÉTROLE**  
 L'Algérie est en 15<sup>e</sup> position  
 et le second producteur en Afrique  
 derrière le Nigéria



Source : CIA World Factbook ; International Energy Statistics

## ANNEX 3



**Algeria**  
Cereal production

	2008-2012 average	2012	2013 forecast	change 2013/2012
	000 tonnes		percent	
Wheat	2,784	3,400	3,200	-6
Barley	1,431	1,500	1,750	17
Oats	102	107	114	7
Others	1	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,318</b>	<b>5,008</b>	<b>5,065</b>	<b>1</b>

Note: percentage change calculated from rounded data.  
Source: FAO/GIEWS Country Cereal Balance Sheets

