Breaking the Chains of Dependency: Investigating the Political Economy of Economic Diversification in Algeria
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Abstract

Scholars ever more agree that economic diversification is becoming a vital strategy to ensure future stability in fossil fuel-export dependent states. This is the reason why, in recent years, grandiose development plans and modest efforts to achieve economic diversification have been initiated by some MENA states, particularly by those in the GCC. In Algeria, neither plans nor serious efforts are undertaken by the country's ruling elites towards achieving this goal. Traditional rentier state literature cannot explain these visible differences in approaches between rentier states. Therefore, by studying contemporary Algerian history, this paper argues that the unwillingness of Algerian elites to diversify the Algerian economy is a result of an interplay between the nature of domestic institutions, international interference and oil. This case-specific approach enables a more accurate explanation for Algeria's persistent political economic development. Moreover, by connecting rentier state theory with insights from postcolonial studies, and statist and critical political economy, this paper also appeals to the growing demand for an internationalised conception of the rentier state.

Keywords: Algeria, Economic Diversification, Oil and Gas, Political Economy, Rentier State

1. Introduction

In March 2019, following the beginning of nationwide protests that would eventually become known as Algeria's *Hirak* protests, Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia invoked the example of Syria in order to quell the situation. He said, "I am not saying this to scare people, no. I am not trying to take advantage of the past, but we should also remember that in Syria it also began with roses" (Malsin 2019). While his warning aimed to discourage further protests, the example of Syria is quite relevant to what would occur in Algeria. In 2011, Syria experienced massive protests against the regime that called for democratic reforms, yet the authoritarian regime ultimately managed to sustain itself (Akhmedov 2022). Likewise, the *Hirak* protests would in time succeed in pressuring for the resignation of President Abdulazziz Bouteflika (Willis 2023). However, for his replacement, Algerians were given the choice between five government-supported candidates with ties to Bouteflika in an election that was boycotted by the protesters (Hincks 2019). Although the struggle drastically radicalised in Syria afterwards (Akhmedov 2022), both countries symbolise a political persistence throughout social turmoil.

With regards to Algeria, this sense of persistence through social turmoil does not end with the political dimension. Economically, the country has been dependent on oil and gas exports since it achieved independence from French occupation in 1962 (Djeflat & Lundvall 2016). In the post-independence era, the hydrocarbon industry was the only industry that initially promised growth, and the revenues accrued from it became crucial to funding the regime's state-led industrialisation and proclaimed 'socialist' policies (Entelis 1999). Nonetheless, the 1980s oil glut and ensuing wave of neoliberalisation deemed Algeria's national development programme a failure (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016), and it destroyed much of the country's industrial and agricultural capabilities that were left (Boukhatem 2022). The state then found itself a peripheral oil and gas exporter to fund the needed imports to feed its population (Swearingen 1990). This situation continues today, with Algeria's 2021 exports comprising roughly 88.2% of gas and petroleum exports by value (Appendix I) and 24% of food imports by value (Appendix II). Thus, in addition to political persistence, economic persistence seems to be another feature of Algeria's historic political economic development.

The observable political and economic resilience in the country's political economy are mutually dependent as well. Sonatrach, Algeria's state-owned oil and gas company, is firmly governed by National Liberation Front (FLN or *Front de Libération Nationale*) hardliners. Despite power struggles in the late 2000s, the state, backed by the military, managed to keep control over the company (Entelis 2011) and use its revenues to engage in political patronage and buy social peace (Lefèvre 2017). These tripartite pillars of the Algerian state—the FLN, the military, and Sonatrach—have upheld the status quo as a vulnerable nexus (Entelis 2011). However, this nexus faces renewed challenges in the modern world economy. The European Union (EU) is accelerating its energy transition, urged by the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine (Osička & Černoch 2022), and scholars are agreeing that oil demand will peak before 2030. This forms an existential threat to hydrocarbon export-dependent states, and economic diversification has become a vital strategy to ensure future stability (Fattouh & Sen 2021). Nonetheless, Algerian efforts and an overarching strategy for this objective have been absent so far (Hamouchene 2022), and the country now lags notably behind other resource-rich MENA states in economic diversification (Matallah 2022). To answer why, this paper will answer the following research question:

- Why are Algerian political economic elites unwilling to diversify the Algerian economy, despite economic diversification being vital to ensure future stability?

This research question will be answered by examining three periods in Algeria's history since the state achieved independence in 1962. Specifically, the immediate post-independence era, the 1991–2002 Algerian Civil War, and the period leading up to today. Even if these phases are marked by their own unique elements, continuities subsist throughout (McDougall 2016, 5). With respect to the research question, the three periods will be examined through the utilisation of three streams of academic literature that strive to explain resilient undiversified economies. These are rentier state literature with its focus on oil, continual foreign interference literature through world systems analysis and dependence theory, and historic institutional development literature that is grounded in statist political economy. A subtheme of this paper is to deliver a critique of rentier state literature in general. I aim to augment its shortcomings with insights from related theories in political economy. To internationalise the rentier state concept that helps it rationalise the contemporary realities of resource-export dependent states (Baumann 2019). In light of these ambitions, the remainder of this paper will be structured as follows: First, the scholarly explanations for persistently undiversified economies will be introduced and developed in the literature review. Second, the applicability of these explanations will be explored through the three phases of recent Algerian history. Third, a brief discussion on the limitations of this research with possible suggestions for future research. And finally, the paper's contributions will be summed up in the conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Algeria as a Rentier State

Rentier state literature has traditionally offered the most encompassing theory that explains the behaviour of natural resource export-dependent states, typically oil-rich Middle Eastern states. Since its development in the 1980s, rentier state theory has come to include a broad body of academic work. According to which, a rentier state is usually defined as a political economy that relies significantly on external rent, mostly through exports, instead of internal rent, mostly through domestic taxes. In rentier states, rent generation and wealth distribution are controlled by a small faction of society. By virtue of their reliance on the external world, the elites that make up this small fraction will be more responsive to the demands of the international community than to those of the domestic citizenry (Beblawi 1987). Concerning economic diversification, rentier states have faced many obstacles and often remain reliant on the rents obtained from their exports (Ismail 2010). Policymakers are torn between preserving the political status quo and sustaining economic development through diversification, often prioritising the former over the latter (Kaya, Tok, Koc, Mezher & Tsai 2019). Saudi Arabia is one example of a rentier state where economic diversification efforts have failed to achieve their stated goals (Albassam 2015; Al Naimi 2022), but where the regime has been successful in persevering its rent-controlling power base (Anishchenkova 2020).

Algeria is now also long considered a country that fits the category of a rentier state (Vandewalle 1987; Sandbakken 2006; Zoubir 2022a). Oil and gas exports made up 88.2% of total export value in 2021 (Appendix I), and the government's budget comprised 58.3% of hydrocarbon revenues for the following year (IMF 2023a). *Le Pouvoir*, the term with which Algerians refer to the authoritarian regime, firmly controls the distribution of hydrocarbon revenues, which has allowed them to maintain power despite the socio-economic problems that affect the country and widespread public discontent (Entelis 2011; Rivetti & Cavatorta 2017). However, not every rentier state is the same. In contrast to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, Algeria has failed to produce efficient and successful state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (Hertog 2010). By way of illustration, GCC finance is increasingly competitive and influential around the globe (Hanieh 2020). Moreover, Algeria continuously ranks in the bottom quarter of both the ease of doing business index (World Bank 2023a) and the economic complexity index, a measurement for the knowledge intensity of an economy (OEC 2023). Through these lenses, the country shares much more commonality with states such as Iran, Libya, Nigeria and Venezuela than any of the GCC states.

Herein lies the reason why rentier state literature is insufficient in itself to explain the lack of economic diversification in Algeria. While Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela all classify as rentier states, significant differences can be seen in the intensity of governmental efforts to economically diversify and the successes thereof (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016; Nurunnabi 2017; Purcell 2017; Pietrosemoli & Rodríguez-Monroy 2019; Al Naimi 2022). Even within the GCC states, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), for instance, have had different successes in diversifying due to factors like political participation (Herb 2009). Classical rentier state theory does not account for this. It eschews the question of how accrued revenues from exports are spent (Tétreault 2011) and fails to account for the international aspects of the development of a rentier state. Colonial histories and endless foreign interference are of huge importance in explaining the behaviour of states (Baumann 2019). Certainly for Algeria, French colonial legacies are present to this day (McDougall 2016, 5–6), and the role of the United States (US) and other foreign involvement cannot be understated in facilitating the survival of the FLN power structure (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016; Farrand 2022). Though classical rentier state theory remains a useful tool to explain certain characteristics of natural resource export-dependent states, it must be internationalised to rationalise for the modern realities of those rentier states by allowing a case-specific approach to explain observable differences that are beyond the homogenous Orientalist narrative (Baumann 2019).

2.2. Alternative Explanations for Resilient Undiversified Economies

The necessary insights for the internationalisation of rentier state theory can be obtained from the existing alternative explanations for resilient undiversified economies. Two noteworthy interpretations of this are the continual foreign interference and the historic institutional development arguments. Both theories find their roots in postcolonial scholarship, yet where the former leans into world-systems theory, the latter takes a more state-centric approach. For the former, external forces like imperial and modern France, the United States, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have left enduring legacies in Algeria (McDougall 2016, 5–6; Leopardi 2022). However, an overemphasis on international powers as guiding forces overshadows the role of domestic agency in state development (Bignall 2011). This raised demands for a theory that includes domestic agency in explaining the political economy of a state. The historic institutional development argument caters to this demand by explaining state development at the hands of the institutions of that state and the formation thereof. The modern account of this argument stems from literature on the East Asian miracle (Stiglitz 1996; Chang 2002), yet it, like the rentier state argument, must engage with the international realities of the world system to become relevant (Burkett & Hart-Landsberg 1998; Thurbon & Weiss 2016). This chapter will briefly outline both theories concerning contemporary Algeria and introduce my own thesis on the topic.

First off, the core assumption of the continual foreign interference argument is that external forces in the world system primarily shape and determine the conditions in which a peripheral state is given to develop. This assumption arises from Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974) world systems analysis, where peripheral areas are locked into a global division of labour where value is accrued in the core and is consequently difficult to escape for those peripheral areas. Throughout history, the region that makes up modern-day Algeria has always had to engage with external forces exerting their influence over it. The relationship with France during and after the colonial period exemplifies this point. French energy interests tied their interests to Algeria long after occupation ended in 1962, gaining and defending oil and gas concessions (Naylor 2000, 54; 65–67), which solidified their stakes in the survival of the FLN (Grosser

1967, 47). More recently, the post-independence Algerian regime would not have survived without the military and financial support of the US, IMF and World Bank (Hill 2009; Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). The government's 'anti-terrorist' stance and openness to 'liberalise' the economy helped it secure the necessary international support for its own survival (Leopardi 2022). The West was primarily motivated to secure Algeria's hydrocarbon resources (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016; Prontera 2018), and even recent trade agreements were signed that heavily favoured the Western party (Langan & Price 2020). Proponents of the foreign interference argument can point to this as an example of how the Algerian state is deprived of the means to diversify its economy by Western forces.

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine only amplified this Algeria-West dynamic. European interests in Algerian hydrocarbons have intensified since its reliance on natural gas from Russia has come under threat (Kuzemko, Blondeel, Dupont & Brisbois 2022). Italian energy group ENI has already signed agreements with Sonatrach to expand Algeria's hydrocarbon extraction destined for Europe (Jones, Amante & Jewkes 2022; Landini & Armellini 2023). This renewed interest in Algerian fossil fuels strengthened the regime's financial power base, which was under threat in prior years due to low oil and gas prices (Escribano 2016), and negated any incentive for diversification reforms in the medium term. Moreover, the regime further liberalised the energy sector to make it easier for Western participation in extraction (Boukhatem 2022). Neoliberal market reform, defined in critical political economy as a tool that serves hegemonic power (Arrighi 1994), can deprive Algeria of the needed resources to diversify away from its peripheral position in the world economy. Such as the need for Western technologies and expertise in the energy transition, which would be hard to obtain without Algerian state involvement in a Western-controlled neoliberal market (Boukhatem 2022). Nonetheless, the caveat of the foreign interference argument lies in its overreliance on the international to explain modern observations. It struggles to recognise the importance of domestic dynamics, which in Algeria have shown times when economic diversification could have been possible (McDougall 2016, 278–289). The argument too encounters difficulties in explaining the origins of Algerian underdevelopment (Namkoong 1999).

Second, the historic institutional development argument stresses a more domestic explanation for resilient undiversified economies. It notes that the economic development of a state is best predicted by the quality of the decisions made by the state institutions. This insight was first pioneered by research on the East Asian miracle (Stiglitz 1996; Chang 2002), which builds upon earlier research that establishes the connection between government institutions and economic development (Coase 1960; North 1989). This stream of research found that the period of spectacular growth in certain East Asian states post-World War II was the result of the successful implementation of government policies. For Algeria, this argument exposes the close connection between the state and resource extraction that has deliberately ingrained itself in the Algerian political economy. This is due to a mixture of domestic and colonial elements. Ottoman governors, French imperialists and Algerian nationalist leaders were all ineffective in ideologically uniting the Algerian peoples and consequently relied on a state bureaucracy that utilised the control of economic profits to regulate social life (Ayubi 2005). After independence, FLN governors altered little from the French bureaucratic model that preceded it (Chaliand 1964). Given the lack of 'social cement' in Algerian society, ruling elites never obtained a position of hegemony in a Gramcian sense and thus continued to depend on bureaucratic rentierism and military oppression to keep control (Tlemcani 1986).

The FLN hitherto never evolved into a pure political grouping. It not only reinforced colonial institutional legacies that were based on control but also internalised the militarism of the independence war (McDougall 2016, 185). When oil prices collapsed in the 1980s oil glut, the state-led industrialisation project was abandoned in favour of neoliberal restructuring to secure the reproduction of *Le Pouvoir* (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). Global competition swiftly outcompeted Algeria's industrial and agricultural capabilities, which left the country a peripheral oil and gas exporter (Swearingen 1990; Boukhatem 2022). However, the regime succeeded in maintaining its reproduction and is now reluctant to open the economy to new industries that could potentially threaten its rentier power base. Clement Henry and Robert Springborg (2001) coined the term 'bunker state' to define this occurrence in Algeria of a militaristic state that is insulated from both external and internal pressures. Accordingly, Algeria is differentiated from other GCC rentier states in that it is even less receptive to local demands due to its strong militaristic oppression. For example, in Saudi Arabia, the government occasionally has to yield to internal opposition (Okruhlik 1999). In Algeria, this has rarely happened (Henry 2004; Entelis 2011; Zoubir 2022a). Some authors believe that the inevitable renewable energy transition relies on democratic participation in the global South (Cantarero 2020), yet others indicate that green energy development plans likely reproduce current rentier systems by replacing hydrocarbons with renewable energy exports if no actions against this are undertaken (Hamouchene 2022; Boukhatem 2022).

However, the historic institutional development argument encounters obstacles when faced with explaining how ideas like neoliberalism are imposed on peripheral states and how the world market obstructs the different pathways to development. The argument insufficiently engages with the international domain to clarify why no diversification efforts are undertaken in Algeria. Granted its domestic emphasis on predicting state behaviour, it can instead serve to augment the rentier state and continual foreign interference arguments. This paper will argue that the reason why Algerian elites are unwilling to diversify the Algerian economy is the result of an ongoing interplay between oil, foreign interference and domestic institutions. My argument will unite the strengths of each identified theory and augment their weaknesses by using the other theories to capture a more powerful and accurate explanation for Algeria's persistently undiversified economy. This approach can be taken as a critique of traditional rentier state literature but also as an attempt to internationalise the concept by making it account for present political realities. To make the case for my argument, the remainder of this paper analyses the roles and interactions between oil, international forces and domestic institutions across contemporary Algerian political economic history.

3. Case Studies

3.1. The Post-Independence Era

The case studies will start with an inquiry into Algeria's colonial and ensuing history leading up to the 1991–2002 civil war. This period sets the stage for each of the three aforementioned forces to exert pressure on Algeria's political economy. In the colonial era, the groundwork for Algeria's contemporary state institutions was laid by a continuous interaction between the domestic and international spheres. Both the successes and failures of Ottoman rule and the political structures built by Imperial France have lasting legacies (Chaliand 1964; McDougall 2016, 3–6), which are key to understanding later periods. Oil and gas became increasingly important after the first oil discovery in 1948 and the first gas discovery in 1961 (Entelis 1999). These resources would radically alter Algeria's political economy due to renewed international interests that would strengthen the FLN's power. The generated hydrocarbon revenues would be spent on an ambitious state-led development programme and various social programmes, like free healthcare and education, to ensure public support (Sandbakken 2006). However, the regime's reliance on hydrocarbon revenues to fund these programmes meant that its success was deeply tied to foreign capital, technology and the world economy at large (Akre 1988; Begga & Merghit 2014). This configuration would be tested during the 1980s oil glut and thereafter (Tlemcani & Hansen 1989; Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016).

The story of independent Algeria until the civil war begins with the region's incorporation into the Ottoman Empire in 1516 (McDougall 2016, 9–13). This period is important, as the difficulties faced by the Ottomans in Algeria and their responses to them give insight into the conditions upon which the French built their colonial structures. The vast distance between the power core in Anatolia and the province in Algeria defined mutual relations for centuries, making it hard for Ottoman rulers to respond to local resistance and unite the culturally diverse Algerian peoples (Cooley 2005). Ultimately, the Ottomans never managed to develop a shared Algerian identity (Le Gall 1997; Hoexter 1998), yet their policies rooted Algeria into European trade relations and helped form a group of ever-influential Algerian elites (Shuval 2001; McDougall 2016, 45–46; Balci 2022). When Ottoman rule dwindled in the 19th century, the French were quick to gradually occupy the Algerian lands militarily (Sessions 2015). The French rulers then differentiated themselves from their predecessors in that they more forcefully imposed their laws, culture and institutions on Algeria (McDougall 2016, 100–118). However, because of the lack of unity that the Ottomans managed to form, the French had to rely on a strong state bureaucracy to achieve their aspirations (Tlemcani 1986).

French aspirations in Algeria consisted of a mix of cultural assimilation efforts and resource extraction to enrich the French mainland. About the latter, short-term profits were prioritised, destroying much of Algeria's traditional economic sectors and livelihoods (Duffy 2018). For example, excessive cork production led to Algeria losing around half of its forests (Woolsey 1917, 50; Rousseau 1931, 4–5; Davis 2004), which also restricted the access of pastoral populations that depended on these forests, leading to a halved sheep population (White 1983, 225–231). Eventually, discontent and resistance to the French mounted and culminated in the brutal 1954–1962 Algerian War of Independence. Roughly a million Algerians died in the conflict (Horne 1978), yet the state managed to achieve its desired independence with the 1962 Évian Accords. After independence, the FLN quickly established itself as Algeria's sole legal political party. However, owing to the group's initial objectives and exclusion from the French colonial electoral system, it was born as an anti-political movement of militarised direct action that proved ill-equipped to deal with the responsibility of governing a newly sovereign state. This would have long-term ramifications for Algeria's future (McDougall

2016, 185, 244). Heretofore, it has been observed that the groundwork for an independent Algeria was laid by a constant interplay between domestic and international forces.

Moreover, the role of other external actors in supporting Algeria's independence and shaping its future thereafter must be noted. Where the Soviet Union supported the Algerian resistance over its communist elements (Drew 2003; Testas & Karagiannis 2012), the US preferred French relations over Algerian (Zoubir 1995). This sets up many of the features that would come to define Algeria post-independence. Namely, anti-capitalist discourses and a strong state-led industrialisation programme that merged institutional remnants with proclaimed communist ideology (Testas & Karagiannis 2012). State efforts were focused on 'delinking' the economy from the global capitalist system (Amin 1990). A state monopoly on world trade was enacted (McDougall 2016, 283), land redistributions caused an agrarian revolution, and health care and education were made universal (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). The FLN promoted these policies in the name of a mixture of socialist, Islamist and Arabist values to unite the Algerian people, yet evidence suggests that the influence of these values on actual policy does not extend beyond their purpose of claiming political legitimacy (Hill 2006). The interplay between domestic institutions, international interests and hydrocarbons instead points in a direction where the post-independence Algerian political economy was sternly embedded and dependent on the world market.

After independence, FLN governors altered little from the inherited colonial structures that were based on control and extractivism (Chaliand 1964). Both of these features endured accordingly. With regards to control, perceived opposition to the state kept being met with militarised direct action via violent oppression and assassinations (Malley 1996). Regarding extractivism, the sale of Algerian oil and gas that dates back to 1958 perfectly played into the system that was emerging at the hands of the FLN (Lefèvre 2017). French firms and experts at first directly participated in the extraction of these resources, but when Algerian leaders began nationalising the industry, their direct participation was withdrawn (Naylor 2015). The now state-owned hydrocarbon revenues were funnelled towards the state-led industrialisation programme that also aimed to uphold the dominant social bloc consisting of the army and rising technocracy. Subsidies were allocated based on political patronage to monopolists in the economy, which included the army and technocracy, instead of to where industrialisation could be most successful (El Kenz 2009; Belalloufi 2012; Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016; Lefèvre 2017). Meanwhile, the population was 'bought off' through social subsidies like energy price reductions and free healthcare (Leopardi 2022). This fragile arrangement aimed at keeping the FLN in power is what I offer as an alternative to the ideological interpretation that has been at the heart of FLN policy since 1962.

Nonetheless, this structure possessed a major Achilles heel that induced the eventual failure of the state-led development programme: hydrocarbon dependency. Despite the government discourses, Algeria was deeply embedded in the global capitalist system through its reliance on world oil price fluctuations and foreign capital to acquire the necessary technologies and resources to industrialise (Tlemcani & Hansen 1989; Rebah 2011; Belalloufi 2012). When oil prices were high, the fragile arrangement held firm despite underlying tensions (McDougall 2016, 257–258), yet the 1980s oil glut revealed the deficiencies that manifested themselves in the Algerian model. SOEs faced huge financial deficits and were highly unproductive due to the uncompetitive Algerian market, continuous trade restrictions and corruption (World Bank 1994; Ehteshami & Murphy 1996). Consequently, state funding for these SOEs became a big burden when hydrocarbon revenues faced downward pressure (Birol, Aleagha & Ferroukhi 1995). Social subsidies were also under threat, causing widespread discontent that posed a challenge to the regime (Tlemcani & Hansen 1989). Confronted with unpopularity at home, the FLN turned to the IMF, World Bank and neoliberal restructuring to address the challenges at home (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). However, market reforms were enacted slowly and superficially due to the lobbying of groups that profited under the previous system, such as the army and technocracy (Werenfels 2002; Hertog 2010). This economic mismanagement resulted in Algeria's unproductive industrial and agricultural capabilities being outcompeted and destroyed once trade barriers were slowly lifted (Boukhatem 2022).

In the end, the state found itself a peripheral oil and gas exporter to fund the needed imports to feed its population (Swearingen 1990). The government never delinked the economy from the world market due to its constant reliance on hydrocarbon sales. The established political structures, shaped by both domestic and international forces, enabled the formation of an undiversified extractive economy where leaders controlled rents and society. Liberal market reform marks a shift from an influential emphasis on domestic institutions to an emphasis on international interests. Yet the presence of oil and gas similarly resulted in an undiversified economy dominated by *Le Pouvoir*. As observed, the interplay between domestic institutions, international interests and hydrocarbons constantly directs Algeria towards an undiversified future. Another effect caused by market liberalisation was increased demands for political liberalisation from society (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). This discontent culminated in the 1988 October Riots (Kepel 2002), following which the one-party system was abandoned and public elections were called (Parks 2012). When it became clear that the main opposition, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), was set to win by a landslide, FLN-loyalists in the military committed a coup d'état. This decision to extend the system would open the door for intense violence to be unleashed on Algerian society and mark the beginning of the Algerian Civil War (McDougall 2016, 289).

3.2. The Algerian Civil War

In the years prior to and throughout the 1991–2002 Algerian Civil War, there were some key moments where Algeria could have gone down an alternative economic path. Studying these moments provides a necessary understanding of the powerful forces in Algeria that halt the development of economic industries outside of the existing rentier system. Namely, the forces of the tripartite pillars of the Algerian state that had fully emerged by this time: the FLN, the military, and Sonatrach (Entelis 2011). As observed, the basis for this nexus to dominate Algeria was laid by the interaction of international colonial remnants and their adoption by domestic forces, ultimately solidified by hydrocarbon rents. Until the 1990s, *Le Pouvoir* sustained itself by way of its self-built institutions and oppression mechanisms. However, the drop in export revenues resulted in the regime having to turn to international actors like the IMF, the World Bank and the US to ensure its reproduction. Since those actors prioritised Western energy and security needs over political change, *Le Pouvoir* weathered the civil war generally unscathed (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). Despite the shift in the balance of power within Algeria from domestic institutions to international interests and hydrocarbons, little in the end changed about the undiversified economy. The case of the civil war will show that none of the three forces in my argument ever pushed towards economic diversification.

The most notable period in recent history where Algeria could have gone down an alternative economic path occurred right before the civil war. Watching the 1980s oil glut crisis unfold, Mouloud Hamrouche and a team of experts began developing proposals to reinvigorate the economy with the acquiescence of President Chadli Benjedid. Their pragmatic approach led to their proposals being centred around parting the state bureaucracy from the economy so as to cut out the cronyism and corruption that had become entrenched in the system (Hamrouche 2009). Examples include proposals aimed at establishing an independent central bank, ending the state monopoly on foreign trade, and allocating SOE funding through an independent organisation as opposed to state ministries (Hadj Nacer 2009). At first, the political effects of these reforms were not considered by the reform team, yet soon they realised that "there can be no economic democracy without political democracy" (Reform group member 2009). An economic overhaul of this magnitude would have wrecked the FLN's financial power base, and though the group lacked real political power, their proposals were perceived as a direct attack on circuits of hydrocarbon rent (McDougall 2016, 281–284). Military officers, FLN elitists, local bureaucrats, private entrepreneurs, and property networks composed of former security service and party leaders all saw their interests threatened. Following an ill-planned speech by President Chadli in September 1988 that proclaimed the enemies of reform to be inside the system, anti-regime protests erupted, and *Le Pouvoir* took up direct action, often violent, to eliminate their enemies inside and outside the state (McDougall 2016, 284–285).

Next to the killing of hundreds of protesters by the Algerian army, two instances prove this claim. First, Mouloud Hamrouche would rise to the post of Prime Minister in 1989, where he again attempted to push for market-oriented reform to break the rentier system. Nevertheless, Hamrouche was stopped by the army and forced to resign in 1991 (Dévoluy & Duteil 1994). Economic liberalisation continued thereafter, but only in a manner that favoured the previous benefactors (Addi 2006; Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). Second, when FLN-founder and former exile Mohamed Boudiaf was asked to return to Algeria to head the High Council of State that oversaw the unfolding political crisis in 1992, he was assassinated a few months later. His fierce stance against corruption and growing popularity among the Algerian youth again threatened powerful interests in the state, leading to his assassination (McDougall 2016, 303–304). These instances highlight the diametric opposition between Algeria's ingrained institutions and political and economic reform. Whenever historic efforts are made that would allow for economic openness, as soon as elite interests are perceived to be under threat, the initiators behind those efforts are quickly eliminated and the economy sealed off once more. A behavioural pattern that is still observed today.

As the civil war lasted, FLN elites realised that it required additional support outside of the traditional state structures to preserve their positions. Desperate for international credit, the government submitted to the IMF and World Bank for financial support (Belalloufi 2012). Stuck with a double-edged weakness resulting from impopularity at home and international desires for concessions, the regime chose the latter to combat the former (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). To lure foreign investment to the country, they offered lucrative oil and gas deals to Western governments and extraction commissions to Western firms. For example, in November 1996, the Maghreb-Europe Gas Pipeline was opened to supply Europe through Spain and Portugal (Hamouchene 2014). This strategy tied the FLN's survival to the Western investments made in Algeria, simultaneously ensuring their support in the civil war. The generated rents from these deals would flow towards the militarisation of the state at the cost of civil society, to which the West would turn a blind eye (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). Moreover, the IMF and World Bank provided major financial support to the government in the form of financial assistance programmes during the same period (Leopardi 2022). These assistance packages are found to respond to the political objectives of the West in MENA (Harrigan, Wang & El-Said 2006), and it seems unlikely that the regime would have survived like it did without it (Hill 2009; Leopardi 2022). This shows how international interests truly relate to the development of Algeria's political economy.

In return for the financial support, the IMF and World Bank were keen on measures to be enacted per the orthodoxy of the Washington Consensus (Leopardi 2022). Chief amongst those was the demand to implement privatisation reforms that would allegiantly increase private efficiency and end the public sector drain on the state's resources (Aghrout, Bouhezza & Sadaoui 2004). However, during the negotiations for a second support package in 1991, the government managed to secure a major financial inflow despite not presenting any substantial plans for implementing privatisation reforms (IMF 1991; Nellis 1991; World Bank 1991). By the turn of the century, market-liberal reforms had only superficially affected the country. While most price controls were lifted, some smaller state-owned monopolies were privatised, and new regulations for the banking sector were adopted, the state remained the main force in the economy. The heart of the rentier system was kept intact as the FLN managed to leave the oil and gas industries unaffected by any reform (Hill 2009; Leopardi 2022). One can debate the extent to which the IMF and World Bank were driven by Western energy interests, yet given their leniency towards accepting lacklustre results from Algerian politicians, I doubt whether the case is an exception to the rule. International interests and hydrocarbons saved Algeria's political institutions at a time when those institutions could not save themselves.

International support for the state did diminish when the reform programmes ended and the conflict took a more radical and international turn. The Air France Airbus hijacking, Paris metro bombings and uptick in domestic massacres led to international isolation (Shabafrouz 2010), as the FLN was believed to be a systemic element in the terror that occurred (Pervillé

2014). After the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration's 'global war on terror' provided the perfect moment for the regime to regain Western support (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). In a letter by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in The Washington Times, he pledged full Algerian cooperation regarding American intelligence and energy needs in return for their backing of the government (Bouteflika 2002). The backing came Bouteflika's way at the cost of great concessions. The government had to award multi-billion-dollar contracts to Western firms in the oil and gas industry (Malti 2010, 326–327) and take a softer stance on issues regarding Palestine, Iran and Iraq (Rouabah 2015). Despite this loss of national sovereignty, the FLN secured its position in power. The army was reinforced by Western support, and the resistance became more and more disenfranchised as a result (Wiktorowicz 2001). Eventually, high oil prices re-flooded the rentier system with new financial resources, returning to a situation like before the conflict (McDougall 2016, 321). And with that, Algeria's 'reforming decade' ended with the same groups in power, operating under similar patrimonial models.

Though the civil war died a slow death until the year 2002, the conflict claimed the lives of up to 200,000 people, and many more were either displaced or disappeared (Zeraoulia 2020). It is undeniable that without the international support it received, the government would not have survived the conflict in the way that it eventually did (Hill 2009). The most significant change that ultimately occurred was the moderate loss in sovereignty over the economy that domestic institutions suffered vis-à-vis international interests. However, Algeria remained greatly dependent on hydrocarbon exports, unemployment stayed high (IMF 2023b), and it kept ranking low on the ease of doing business index (World Bank 2022). This shows how neither domestic institutions, international interests, nor the presence of oil and gas push Algeria in the direction of economic diversification. International energy interests prevailed over other concerns in Algerian matters, and *Le Pouvoir* made strategic use of this to ensure its own survival (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). Similar to what occurred in other MENA states during this period, the regime managed to stand up against international pressure and make it work for their own goals (Leopardi 2022). All in all, despite the shift in the balance of power between the three forces in Algeria's political economy, the civil war shows a clear case of how such a different balance still ends up with similar undiversified results.

3.3. Modern Day Algeria

The two decades succeeding the civil war are by and large defined by the ruling period of President Bouteflika until 2019. For the most part, his administration carried on facilitating the trends that had been identified in the previous case studies. The gradual subservience to the demands of global capitalism slowly intensified, yet the end result regarding the economy stayed unaltered (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). Despite allowing more foreign ownership of non-energy companies with operations in the country (US ITA 2023), substantial foreign investment stayed clear (Chaplyuk, Akhmedov, Zeitoun, Abueva & Al Humssi, 2022). Today, Algeria’s export mix comprises approximately 88.2% of oil and gas exports (Appendix I), and roughly 65% of exports are destined for Europe (Appendix III). As long as Algeria's oil and gas reserves satisfy those who set the international agenda, the shift of power in the political economy from domestic institutions to international interests does not change the undiversified economy. This final case study will mainly analyse how the proclaimed largest threat to the dynamic of the three forces, the renewable energy transition, has thus far panned out. The threat this poses is found to be overblown, and instead, the interplay continues. The diminishing power of domestic institutions causes political elites to adopt a careful economic approach and, in the medium term, perpetuate the role of oil and gas in the economy.

Urged by the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU has accelerated its efforts around its energy transition (Osička & Černoch 2022). By 2030, 42.5% of its total energy consumption is targeted to consist of renewable energies, and the dependency on fossil fuel imports is to be reduced as well (European Commission 2023). For states like Algeria that are fully reliant on this trade flow (Appendix III), this development forms an existential threat (Capros et al. 2018; Hamouchene 2022). Hydrocarbon export revenues are the only significant monetary stream into the financing of the state (Appendix IV), and as observed, the regime historically used this flow to overcome encountered difficulties. Therefore, it is seen as vital for the state to move towards the production of renewable energies to ensure future stability (Fattouh & Sen 2021). Algerian lands are identified as having enormous potential for the production of both solar and wind energy (Guezgouz, Jurasz, Chouai, Bloomfield & Bekkouche 2021), and the government has announced ambitious objectives to harvest this potential. However, these objectives are not realistic when accounting for the meagre progress that has yet been made. For instance, of the 22 gigawatt target for 2030 that was announced in 2011, less than 500 megawatts were installed by 2021 (IRENA 2021). This target was later reduced, yet that is unrealistic to be met as well (Hamouchene 2022).

The interplay between the three political-economic forces can help explain the shortcomings in Algeria's renewable adoption strategy. In the short term, international energy interests discourage the government from furthering transition efforts. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine had a dual effect. On the one hand, it urged the need for the energy transition, while on the other, it sparked new fossil fuel extraction deals. In early 2022, Italian energy group ENI signed an agreement with Sonatrach to export 9 billion cubic metres of extra gas to Italy by 2023-2024 (Landini 2022), which secures future funding for the Algerian state (Appendix IV). In the longer term, elements innate to the state institutions hinder the transition. These include monopolistic power structures, insufficient regulatory support, subsidised electricity, unstable policies and widespread political scepticism. Furthermore, the lack of internationally diffused knowledge and expertise, due to intellectual property rights that defend corporate Western interests (Raiser, Naims & Bruhn 2017; Boukhatem 2022), is also found to obstruct renewable technology adoption in Algeria (Sakhraoui, Awopone, von Hirschhausen, Kebir & Agadi 2023). The Ouarzazate Solar Plant in Morocco offers a comparable example of what this dependence on Western technology and expertise may result in. Through EU financing and technology transfers, they secured a fixed energy flow from the plant to Europe under the contract. This appropriation of foreign lands for ecological purposes is referred to as 'green grabbing' by scholars (Castree 2008; Fairhead 2012; Rignall 2012; Hamouchene 2016).

Given their historic reluctance to cede power over the domestic economy (Chibberr 1996), it is likely that the FLN views the current ‘green’ energy projects in their neighbourhood as too risky. While some authors claim that the inevitable transition will depend on political change in the global South (Cantarero 2020), I disagree with the danger it poses to the regime and the interplay it depends upon. The importance of oil in our world economy extends way beyond energy, which is unlikely to change in the near future (Hanieh 2021). Additionally, to reach European energy ambitions, an energy transition in the MENA region has been identified as a necessity too (Trieb & Müller-Steinhagen 2007; Bensala, Hess, Allaoui, Brahami & Denaï 2019). One scenario is that renewables will incrementally overtake the role of hydrocarbons in Algeria’s rentier system, and the regime’s efforts have thus far been motivated with this scenario in mind (Boukhatem 2022). As long as hydrocarbon rents satisfy the needs of the state, a fundamental change in approach is rejected. It is not implausible to believe that Algeria’s vast renewable production potential could again cause the West to turn a blind eye if their energy needs are being met. Whether this approach would solve the imminent climate crisis is disputed (Cantarero 2020; Boukhatem 2022; Hamouchene 2022), yet it does show how the interplay of the three forces causing an undiversified political economy will continue to shape the future and is far from becoming a relic of the past.

The energy transition is not the only domain where the government's reluctance to transform the economy is clear. Algeria's recent involvement in the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) highlights a similar opposition between diversification and the ingrained institutions of the Algerian state. Since joining the BRI in 2018 (Sacks 2021), most attention has focused on developing the needed infrastructure for Algeria to permit it and China to benefit more from global trade flows in the Mediterranean (US ITA 2020; Senadjki, Ogbeidu, Awal, Senadjki & Nachef 2021; Zoubir 2022b). The flagship project, El Hamdania Port, was set to become the second deep-water port in Africa and Algeria's largest trading facility. However, following the *Hirak* protests in early 2019, the project has been indefinitely delayed (US ITA 2020). Negotiations to relaunch the project have thus far not come to fruition, resulting in Chinese firms shifting their attention to Moroccan projects instead (Calabrese 2021). Higher oil and gas prices reawakened a perceived sense of security among Algeria's ruling elites (Serrano 2022), causing them to fall back on their economic nationalism tendencies (Calabrese 2021). This allegedly made them seek a lesser dependence on China in the renewed negotiations, causing them to fail. The response is typical for the regime when national sovereignty over the economy is under threat. Diversification is prevented as long as international energy interests support the rentier system upon which domestic institutions depend.

Where the threat posed by the energy transition is found to be inflated, the 2019–2021 *Hirak* had the potential to be the biggest shock encountered by the dynamic of domestic institutions, international interests and hydrocarbons in recent history. *Le Pouvoir* had not confronted any sincere form of political opposition since the civil war, and their initial response when it emerged again appeared incoherent and confused (Willis 2023). While the military at first reacted favourably by ousting Bouteflika, the new authorities under President Tebboune have not made any systemic change since (Zoubir 2022a). Tebboune held close ties to the previous administration (BBC 2019), and once in office, he committed to fierce oppression measures that were facilitated in their success by the COVID-19 pandemic (Serres 2021). The disunity amongst the opposition and the uptick in hydrocarbon revenues eventually allowed the regime to overcome yet another difficult time (Rachidi 2021; Serrano 2022). Though we will never know what would have happened without the pandemic barring public life from continuing, all forces in Algeria's political economy pushed towards this particular outcome. Besides the uptick in oil prices, both the army and international community did not press for additional changes once Bouteflika was ousted. The former to preserve their own powers, and the latter to prevent their military and energy commitments in Algeria from being affected. Especially French and American commitments (Rachidi 2021; Serres 2021).

In sum, the latest developments in modern-day Algeria fall in line with what was observed in earlier time periods. Despite the fluency in the configuration and interactions between local institutions, international interests and hydrocarbons, Algeria's political economy is never directed towards economic diversification. The FLN cemented themselves into the country's political institutions and aligned their survival strategically with Western energy and security interests. Their illusive immunity from societal demands is reminiscent of what Clement Henry and Robert Springborg (2001) called the 'bunker state'. The renewable transition is unlikely to diminish this dynamic at play, as Algeria's vast production potential could align again with the needs and desires of the West, slowly replacing hydrocarbons with renewables in the interplay. Neither of the three forces requires Algerian diversification to achieve their objectives, and that is what ultimately prevents the economy from doing so. The presence of fossil fuels in the Algerian case steers international interests in such a manner that domestic institutions have been allowed to construct themselves around this trade. Moments of crisis in politics only occur when oil prices hit a period of low prices following a period of high prices (Appendix V), yet each time the connection between domestic intuitions and international interests saves *Le Pouvoir* from fundamental change because of other aligning interests. Like Western military commitments to combat terrorism or neoliberal reform during the civil war.

4. Discussion

One can argue for three main weaknesses in my argument that can either be refuted or raise the need for future research to apply my concept universally. Namely, the case of Algeria's growing pharmaceutical industry, the importance of internal rivalries and the missing force of society in the interplay. First, the successes of Algeria's pharmaceutical industry can serve as an example of economic diversification in the country. According to the Algerian Minister of Pharmaceutical Industry, the industry registered 17% growth last decade (Canada TCS 2022), and 70% of domestic demand is now produced within the country (Fourneris 2022). Despite these statistics, economic diversification is still far from achieved. Pharmaceutical exports are still severely limited (Abadli, Kooli & Otmani 2020; Appendix I), and the industry's overall economic value adds up to little compared to the dominant hydrocarbon sector (Canada TCS 2022; World Bank 2023b). Moreover, future growth is restricted due to the control the state maintains over it (Laouisset 2021), as they reserve the right to intervene through the national industrial institutions (Alsamara, Farouk & Abel 2022). State control is further enhanced by the industry's designation as a 'strategic sector', which excludes it from the abolishment of the 51/49 ownership rule (IMF 2023c, 50). Therefore, Algeria's pharmaceutical industry must rather be seen as a FLN attempt to limit foreign dependency and is far from establishing the economic diversification that is sought after in this paper.

Second, the interests of domestic institutions and international interests have been presented as relatively homogenous in this paper. This is, in good part, due to the mutual dependency that has developed between the different groups in *Le Pouvoir* and the correlating interests of the international actors that have had the most influence over the country: France, the US, the IMF and the World Bank. While inter-elite rivalries have been acknowledged to an extent, such as with the military ousting of Bouteflika, their wider impact on economic policies has not been explored to its fullest extent. John Entelis (1999) has argued that elite rivalry over SOEs is one of the reasons why Algeria struggles to move beyond hydrocarbon dependency. Furthermore, the proceeding diversion from a unipolar to a multipolar world order has the power to deunify international interests in the case of Algeria. The accelerating Sino-Algerian relations are just one aspect that is changing the nature of international interests in Algeria and the FLN's position concerning the rest of the world (Zoubir 2022b). However, the effect of this on the economy is again to be seen. In order for the concept in this paper of the three political economic forces to become truly universally applicable, more research would have to be done on cases where the domestic institutions or international interests of a rentier state are less historically homogenous.

Finally, the omitted factor of civil society in shaping Algeria's political economy could be argued to be the main weakness in the argument. Though it is undeniable that contemporary economic affairs in the country have been firmly run by a dominant, unproductive private bourgeoisie (Boubekeur 2013), opposition to the system has endured since the early 1990s. Especially in the Algerian diaspora, calls for democratic reform are commonly heard, but the regime has mostly managed to oppress those voices domestically through various oppression measures (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). Algeria's state institutions maintain a strong grip over civil society (Lorch & Bunk 2016), and the latter's influence on economic affairs has been limited because of it (Hamouchene & Rouabah 2016). Nevertheless, the civil war and *Hirak* protests reveal the danger to the interplay that civil society as a counter-hegemonic force still poses. In both instances, domestic institutions, international interests and oil and gas collectively worked against civil society to perpetuate the status quo, yet under other circumstances, Algeria's future might have looked a lot different. More research would have to be done to analyse the extent of civil society that serves as a counter-hegemonic force to the interplay of the three forces in rentier states. For example, under what conditions it is able to change the status quo and whether that could lead to economic diversification.

5. Conclusion

The reason for Algerian political economic elites' unwillingness to diversify the economy is found to be the result of an ongoing interplay between three main forces in Algeria's political economy. Specifically, the nature of ingrained domestic institutions, international interests, and the presence of vast hydrocarbon reserves. These individual forces and the connections between them never pushed Algeria in the direction of economic diversification, and the state consequently never diversified its economic makeup. Despite the power balance between the three forces shifting in Algeria's history, the result regarding the economy is always the same. Due to the FLN's careful alignment with international interests, the latter never forced the regime to change course. And these successes meant that the institutions these elites built surrounding colonial remnants and resource extraction have lasted to this day. As long as Algeria's fossil fuel reserves satisfy the needs and desires of the international community, there is no need for a strategy of diversification. A similar logic applies to the country's lagging energy transition. Hydrocarbon exports will provide finance to the state for the foreseeable future, and Algeria's vast solar and wind production potential is necessary to be exploited for reaching European objectives, which will likely result in similar dynamics applying as before. The difference now would be that renewable energy slowly replaces oil and gas in the interplay.

The framework in this paper caters to the growing demand for a conception of the rentier state that accounts for the international domain and domestic forces. Without the interests of local institutions and international actors aligning in times when hydrocarbon revenues were low, such as during the civil war and *Hirak* through military commitments against terrorism, it remains to be debated whether *Le Pouvoir* and the rentier state could have survived. This concept of the interplay between the three forces of a state's political economy has the ability to be universally applicable to all rentier states. Where traditional rentier state theory fails to explain the differences in approaches to economic diversification by rentier states, the theory in this paper can do so. However, additional research would have to be conducted in cases where the homogeneity of the forces in interplay is compromised and the role of society as a counter-hegemonic force becomes clearer. All things considered, the pressure exerted by the three forces in Algeria's political economy is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. There is no imminent sign for this to change, and so the lineages of previous time periods will continue to influence the present realities of the people living in modern-day Algeria.

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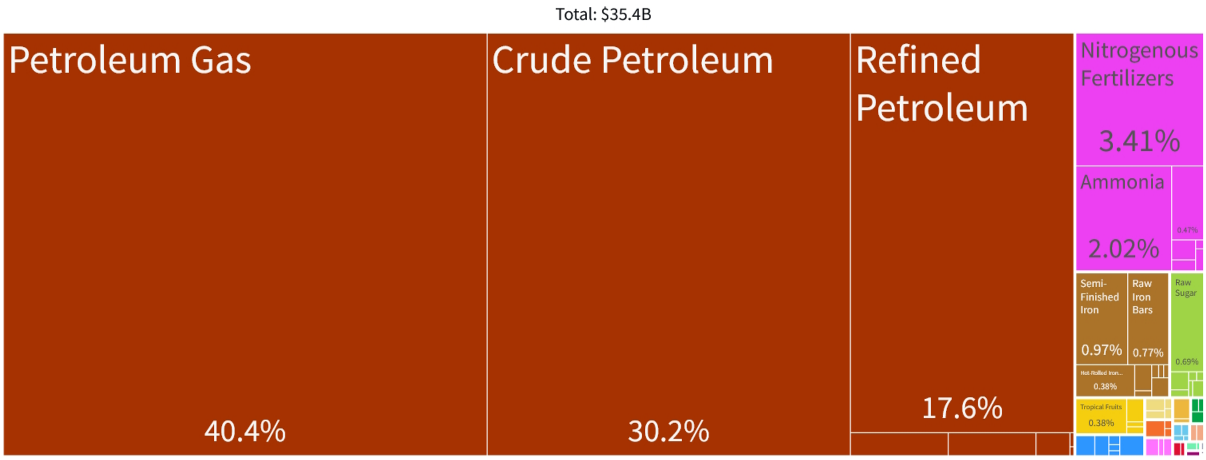
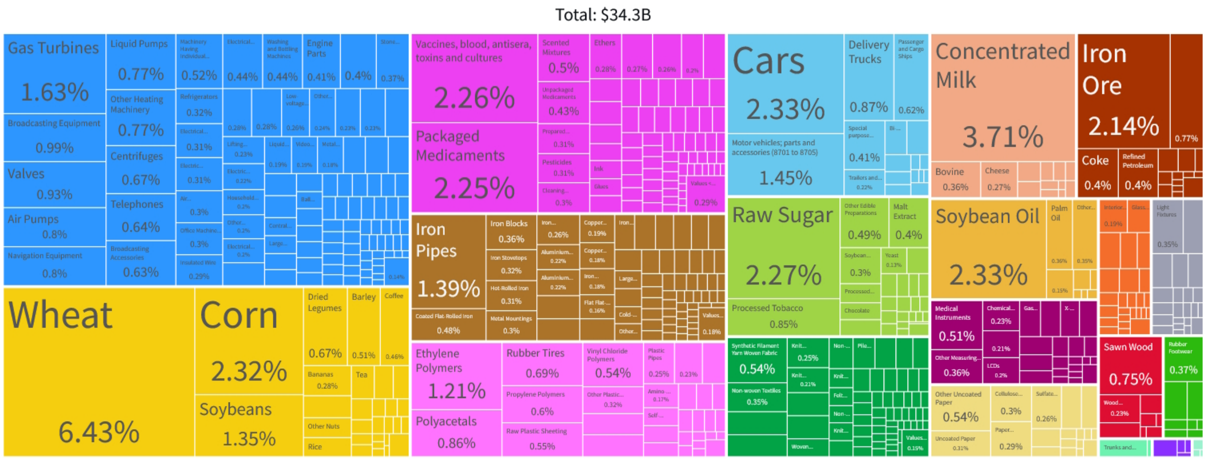
7. Appendix

Appendix I – Algeria's 2021 Export Composition by Value



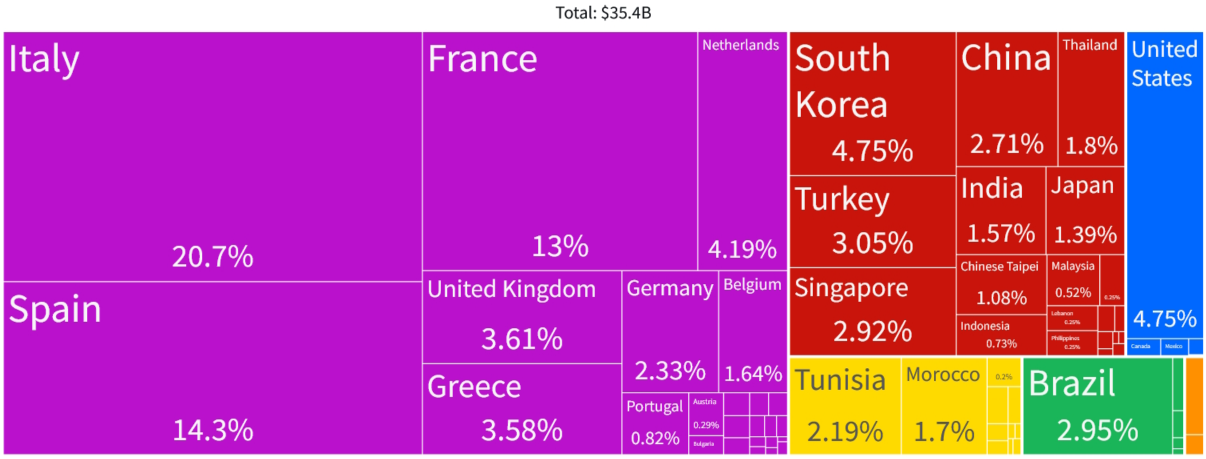
Source: OEC (2023). Algeria. *The Observatory of Economic Complexity*. Retrieved (2023) from https://oec.world/en/profile/country/dza.

Appendix II – Algeria's 2021 Import Composition by Value



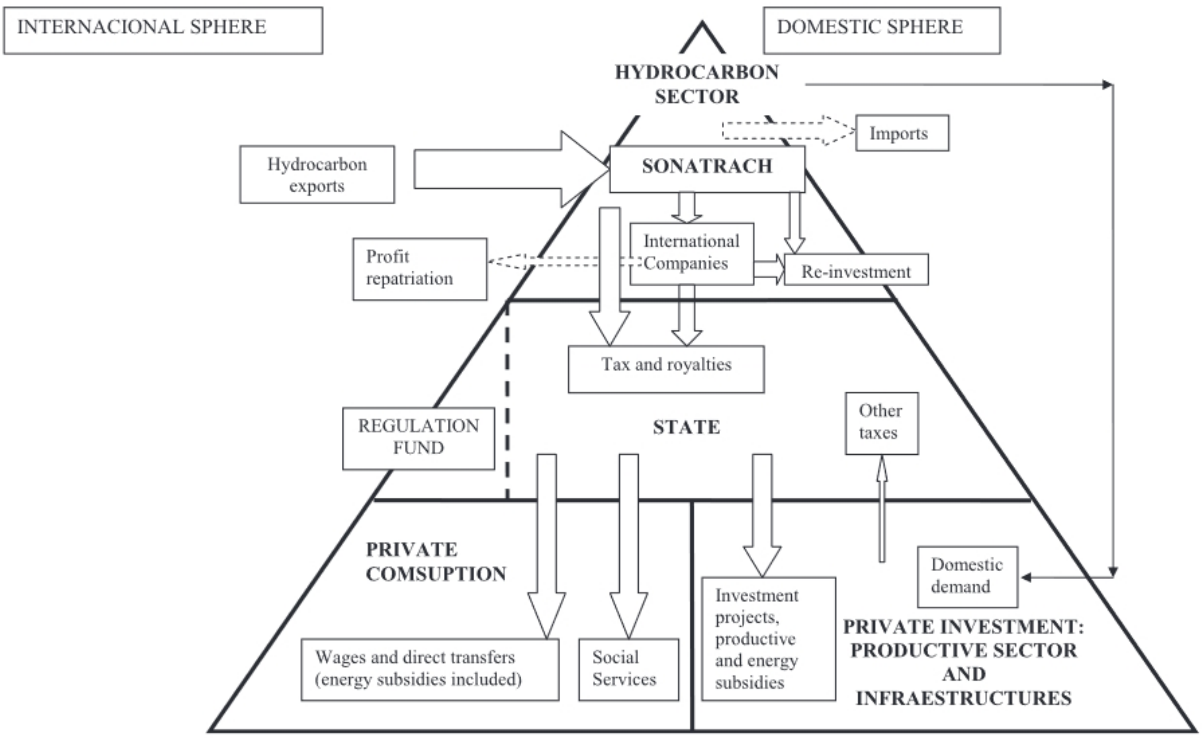
Source: OEC (2023). Algeria. *The Observatory of Economic Complexity*. Retrieved (2023) from https://oec.world/en/profile/country/dza.

Appendix III – Algeria's 2021 Export Destinations by Value



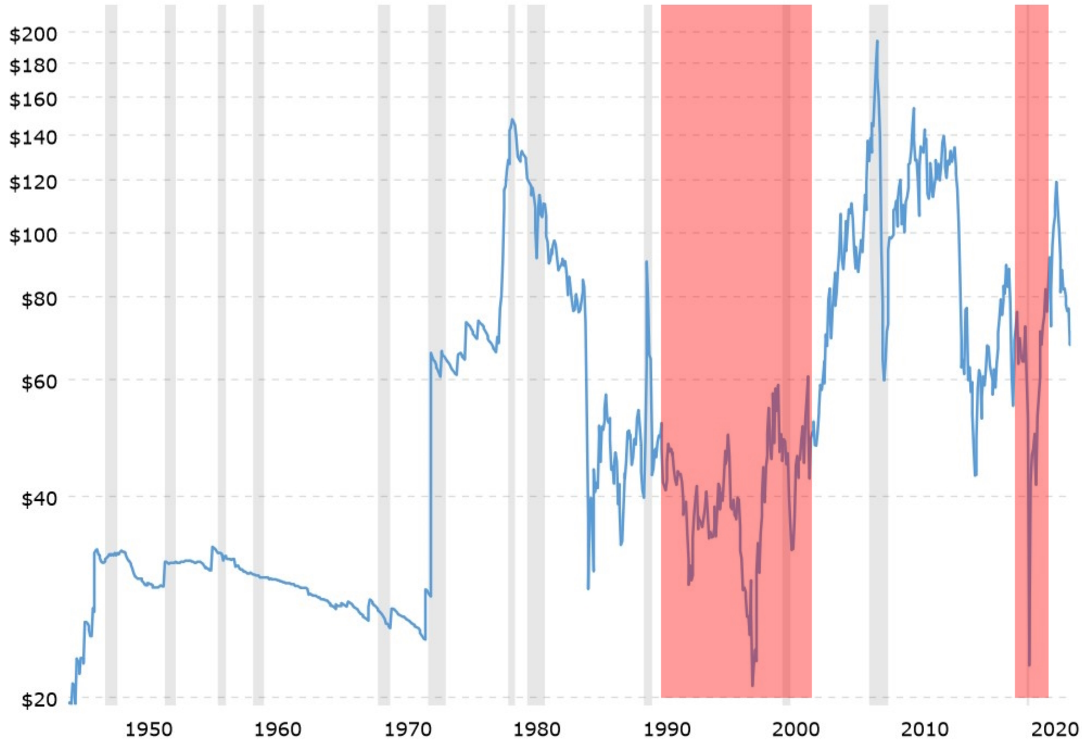
Source: OEC (2023). Algeria. *The Observatory of Economic Complexity*. Retrieved (2023) from https://oec.world/en/profile/country/dza.

Appendix IV – Outline of Rentier Dynamic in Algeria



Source: Álvarez, A.M. (2010). Rentierism in the Algerian economy based on oil and natural gas. *Energy Policy*, 38(10), pp. 6338–6348.

Appendix V – Average Crude Oil Price per Year with Algeria's Political Crisis Moments



Source: Macrotrends (2023). Crude Oil Prices - 70 Year Historical Chart. *Macrotrends*. Retrieved (2023) from https://www.macrotrends.net/1369/crude-oil-price-history-chart.