

IVAN URETA (ed.)

MEDIA, MIGRATION AND PUBLIC OPINION

Myths, Prejudices and the Challenge of
Attaining Mutual Understanding between
Europe and North Africa



Peter Lang

Sensitive issues like migration and human mobility provoke paradigms and prejudices in public opinion. *Media, Migration and Public Opinion* is a collective effort of academic criticism to overcome these myths.

The main motive of this book is linked to the fact that migration, media and public opinion related issues focusing on North Africa have not been addressed properly by available literature. Against this background, the objective of *Media, Migration and Public Opinion* pursues three aims: Firstly, it fills a gap in the scholarly literature regarding media, political communication and migration by shifting the focus to the North African countries Morocco, Algeria and Libya. Secondly, it assesses to what extent the paradigms of the "other" and its characterization as a source of problems established in receiving countries are also present in sending and transit countries. Thirdly, the book puts North African issues in relation to European countries by presenting case-studies focused on Spain, Malta and Switzerland in order to raise commonalities and differences.

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*Dedicated to all of us:
weak victims and merciless hangmen of myths and prejudices.*

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Introduction

In 2008 the Institute for Mediterranean Studies (IMS, University of Lugano, Switzerland) and the Mediterranean Academy for Diplomatic Studies (MEDAC, University of Malta) strengthened academic and institutional links in order to jointly assess strategic and key issues affecting the Euro-Mediterranean region as a whole. They did so with the commitment of doing the analysis from a southern point of view: where scholars from North Africa would lead the singer's voice.

In 2008 the IMS and the MEDAC celebrated a conference in Malta on Migration, Development and Diplomacy. The result of this event crystallized in a book titled: *Migration, Development and Diplomacy: Perspectives From the Southern Mediterranean* (Ureta and Lutterbeck, 2010).

Immediately after this experience, which involved a number of North African and European scholars, both IMS and MEDAC started to design a new conference devoted to the in depth analysis of a complementary topic: the influence and the impact of the Media on the perception of migrants in receiving and transit countries from both shores of the Mediterranean. This conference was held in Lugano in June 2009. Within this book the link between media and migration has been explored using a comparative approach. We have been conscious to apply a sort of common template that would allow the reading public to detect commonalities and differences among the selected case-studies.

A collective book like this, aims at being considered a collective effort of academic criticism against established paradigms, myths and prejudices that wraps around public opinion regarding sensitive issues such as migration and human mobility. It is true, that, the media given its massive developments over the last decades, has impacted notably on our societies regardless of the degree of economic, political and social development. As has been noted by Meyer, it is difficult to imagine another phenomenon shaping societies in such a profound, irreversible and intensive way (Meyer, 2007). How this literature has addressed these connections – media and its impacts on socio-political issues so far? According to available literature, it would be possible to classify these studies in three main dimensions. The

first dimension involves the ways the public sphere has been impacted and transformed by the evolution of the media and ICTs (Internet and Communication Technologies); this is how public communication has been affected by the influence of the media (Dahlgren and Sparks, 1991; Curran and Seaton, 1998). The second dimension would address the connections between the political sphere and the media. In this dimension, the media is not just the interpretation of the political realm. The media can define a particular political image according to party or ideological interests (Dahlgren and Sparks, 1991; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Graber, McQuail and Norris, 1998; Perse, 2001). Some other studies regarding the impact of the media on shaping the political sphere constitute a third identifiable dimension. They contribute to understanding relationships between media and politics. These studies cover a topic that can be described as media democracy (Stanton, 1994; Meyer, 2007). Within these fields, the United States and Europe have been leading the scholar discourse and have achieved important outcomes and levels of conceptualization regarding the impact of the media on public life, generally speaking.

In the United States, for instance, Cook considers that media might be considered a political institution (Cook, 2005). It is a short step from affirming this to saying that the media could have the faculty of governing. Surely, these forms of governing, while being very efficient, go beyond the traditional way of ruling. Following with the same rationale, Graber, McQuail and Norris do not find deep differences between the politics of news and the news of politics (McQuail and Norris, 2009). At a pragmatic level, these spheres, politics and media, are playing together as agent and shadow and vice-versa.

Entman's work assesses how the media have played a fundamental role in the projection of power within US foreign policy (Entman, 2003). Andersen studies the relation between the media and war during the 20th Century (Andersen, 2006). Traditional experts on the impact of the media on public opinion have set their sights on "protecting" the citizenry from these trends (Iyengar and McGrady, 2006). By quoting those examples and accepting the connections between media and politics, it seems clear that governing might be the action of creating images and illusions. As Bennet stressed, news is the politics of illusion (Bennet, 2008).

Very similar theoretical approaches can be found in Europe. For instance, Statham (2010) demonstrated that media communication and political communication have been a central argument in making the

European Union's scope of legitimacy understandable. Remaining on the subject of the European Union, similar lines of research have been recently developed by Triandafyllidou, Wodala and Krzyzowski (2009). They demonstrate the intimate connection between the role of the media and political communication and the construction of a European public sphere. In the Russian case, the media impact on changing social values was studied (Rosenholm, Nordenstreng and Trutina, 2010)

Western Europe is a case that deserves particular attention. Southern European countries, such as Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Malta and Greece, have to deal with a number of problems related to international migration flows from the southern Mediterranean. In the early 1990s, some groups studied the existence of "media politics" in Western Europe (Siune and Treuttschler, 1992). Recent studies regarding the same area have demonstrated that far-right parties from these countries are using the media to spread extremist, nationalistic and racist discourses (Ellinas, 2010).

In acknowledging that the media impacts increasingly on socio-economic and political process, over the years, our societies are witnessing the importance and impact of migration and mobility related issues. Actually, migration related issues have topped political agendas from 1999 onward and with more intensity since 9/11. That is why, over the last decade, the ground has been – naturally or artificially – very fertile for the development of these interdisciplinary studies. Probably the media entail and evidence the very essence of globalization by breaking and trespassing mental and physical boundaries. But at the same time, this openness and ease to go beyond traditional national boundaries, has endangered an imaginary and real world which is not still ready for thinking in terms of solid and consistent multiculturalism – *tout court* – and internationalism.

The main contribution of this book is linked to the fact that media and migration related issues focusing on North Africa have not been addressed properly by available literature. Scholarly efforts linking media and migration have been concentrated in more industrialised countries or continents, such as the United States and Europe. "Peripheral" zones have not developed in such detail these kind of studies.

Media influence on public opinion regarding sensitive issues such as migration and security in the Euro-Mediterranean area has been studied focusing on North Africa and central Europe (Ureta, 2010 c), specifically on Spain (Zapata, 2008; Lorite, 2002 a, 2002 b, 2006) France (Tailleur, 2002; Blion, 2008) or Malta (Sammut, 2007). More generally, although

still roughly addressing these issues, I would like to underline the pioneering work edited by King and Wood (2001). More recently, a collection of essays gathered by Sabry (2004) continues the precedent line of research. We should also note Mattelart's research on media, migration and transnationalism (Matterlart, 2007). By accepting a bidirectional correlation between politics and media, we can carefully analyse ideas, values, myths, beliefs, images and stereotypes.

This is the construction ground of the social imaginary which has been defined by Taylor (2004)

as the way ordinary people imagine their social surroundings, a way of thinking that is carried in images, stories and legends, which is shared by large groups of people and which makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.

Social imaginary is very dynamic, in constant evolution and contexts can surely provoke easily distortions and changes: for good or for bad. Actually if we consider these issues from the perspectives of the social psychology, it is clear that the use of the language is very much relying on the socio-cultural, political and economic context/s (Van Dijk, 1981). Hence, relations between language and context are interdependent and mutually influenced. Political communication and public discourse, by deploying a populist dimension may impact on context's construction and deconstruction. To certain degrees and depending on the use of the language for political purposes, we agree on what Aron, Minkowsky or Gabel would call schizophrenic language. Currently, in some European countries – The Netherlands, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, etc. –, taking advantage of the economic downturn, political communication and media have used intensively – by developing propagandist methods – images and a rhetoric in which migrants have been placed at the centre of the public discourse, being characterized as elements of danger and menaces. This is not new.

Both Iyengar and Kinder (1982) agree with Lipman's (1922) suspicions regarding the role of the media in providing compelling descriptions of a sort of public world which is completely different from people's direct experiences. The initial research regarding the potential role of propaganda on public opinion was conducted by a pair of American social scientists (Katz and Feldman, 1962). Their findings were pretty unexpected: they discovered that public opinion was quite immune to political persuasion and propaganda.

Hence, these first findings demonstrated a 'minimal effect' of propaganda on public opinion, due to the fact that propaganda just reinforces public preferences. This 'minimal effect' could be interestingly controversial. If those preferences are reinforced by propaganda, the question is when and by whom were those sets of preferences established?

Coming back to the initial point, since the beginning of the 1990s, some of the most important "seasonal products" or fruits have been international migration, human mobility, security, Islam, terrorism and economic crises. It is here where I will anticipate that we are crossing into a period in which the whole international situation – when paradoxical concepts such as globalization and freedom seem to define a consented common language – is dominated by the extensive and massive use of 'branded concepts' in the media and public discourse by the public relations industry (Chomsky, 1992). Yet these studies have been developed in the USA and Europe.

Against this background the objective of this book is threefold. First the book aims at covering an important gap in the scholarly literature regarding media, political communication and migration by focusing mainly in North Africa. Second, to assess to what extent the paradigms that are operating in receiving countries related to the image of the "other" and its characterization as a source of problems and dangers, are present as well in sending and transit countries. Three, to present some case-studies focused on European countries in order to raise commonalities and differences with North Africa.

This book has been split into two parts. The first part, the more extensive, entails a number of chapters dealing with North African countries such as: Algeria, Morocco and Libya. The second one offers analysis on Spain, Malta and Switzerland. Within this volume, chapters' weights between North African and European issues have been deliberately unbalanced; the presence of chapters regarding North Africa doubles that of the Europeans. The methodological reason behind this decision is justifiable due to the scarcity of these kinds of studies focusing on North Africa if we compare them with Europe. Exactly here lies one of the most interesting contributions of this book.

Within the first part, North Africa, in chapter one, Vicken Cheterian develops the idea that the mass media in the Maghreb region can be described as the most dynamic sector and vanguard of civil liberties and democratization efforts in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. In a context of

general weakness of political institutions, political parties, and civil society, journalists do not only struggle for the freedom of expression, but play a role larger than that, and with consequences that impacts the entire political culture. In spite of common historic roots, language, colonial past, and languages used, it should be underlined that the mass media in the three countries have evolved in the last few decades in very particular contexts making the media institutions and their traditions individual experiences and essentially different from each other: Algerian media is just emerging from the trauma of the civil war; Moroccan media is in dynamic development yet conditioned by a context of poor socio-economic conditions, while in Tunisia the media is trying to salvage the few liberties surviving from the period of Bourqiba. Under these circumstances, the media of the Maghreb has to face the challenge of globalization of media in the time of technological revolution.

After laying the first conceptual bricks, it is still necessary to complete this introductory section by offering a global overview on the interconnections between media and migration in North Africa. In so doing, chapter two, written by Davide Vignati offers a broad view about the role of the media and its influence on migration policies in the Maghreb. Given that his assessment goes beyond the classical case-study approach, Vignati's work will permit the reader to have a very good introduction to better understand the philosophy behind this book and specially those chapters focusing on North Africa. The author, since the beginning of his chapter acknowledges that migration very easily raises controversial and emotive public debates, because the subject polarizes society and constantly places the capacity of governance in doubt. This happens evidently in destination countries, and it happens as well in sending and transit countries alike. After describing the origins and characteristics of irregular migration in the Maghreb (which is at the core of the growing Africa migratory flows pushing forward) Vignati continues analysing the existing challenges related to regional governance and humanitarian issues. Once he concludes this section, the author starts to develop the central point of this chapter aiming at giving an answer to the following questions.

How does the public opinion react to the dramatic images of migrants risking their lives to get to Europe? Do the local media report this news or instead does public opinion rely only on European and pan-Arab media? If migration issues are debated in the local media, how do they depict the migrants? What is the impact on public opinion and would-be migrants?

What does the audience think about the European tendentious and discriminatory reports on migrants? What are the Maghrebi governments' attitudes towards media in regards to migration issues?

After these two introductory chapters the book offers five case study which focus on Algeria, Morocco and Libya.

Chapter three centers its attention on Algeria and has been written by Assia Kaced. Her study is based on news analysis and the research questions she is addressing through this chapter are strictly bounded up with the treatment of local newspapers of issues such Algerian clandestine migration. Through her analysis the reader will find answer to the next questions: what is the position of the media towards the illegal immigrant as an individual? In other words, how does the media represent the illegal immigrant for its readership? Is the harraga a hero to be admired or a victim to be pitied? To what extent do media representations of the harraga reinforce or change current national perceptions as well as social attitudes and values?

Methodologically speaking, Kaced have identified and analyzed the main narratives and themes found in two Algerian dailies. She has concentrated on the representation of the would-be illegal immigrants in both *El Chourouk* and *El Watan*. Her choice of the two dailies has been based, on the one hand on the fact that they are the two top publications in Algeria, and on the other hand, on the fact that one is in Arabic (*El Chourouk*) and the other in French (*El Watan*), thus covering almost 90 percent of the literate population in the country. For the two newspapers, she has chosen the main articles covering the year 2008 and the first term of 2009 that makes a total of 119 articles.

Chapter four is devoted to Algeria as well and Hocine Labdelaoui has been the author. His chapter follows the methodology used by Assia Kaced in the previous study. Labdelaoui acknowledges that migration related issues are very widely and commonly treated by the Algerian press. Algerian clandestine immigration is known as harraga and those called harragas identify the actors. By analyzing the Algerian press, illegal immigration of African or Asian nationals and the professional and social success of those Algerians living abroad, are the themes that arouse more attention and interest. Labdelaoui's objective aims at testing the validity of his hypothesis. A research question that is very much related to the elements intervening in the construction of the social imaginary. Hence by highlighting the success of Algerians living abroad, the Algerian press might encourage

in certain ways immigration by illegal means, and, conversely, at the same time, a totally opposite and paradoxal public discourse is done when the Algerian press condemn those harragas who are trying to flee from their country.

Traveling now to Morocco, Moha Ennaji in chapter five aims to explore the symbolic dimensions of migration and the impact of media on both sides of the Mediterranean on Moroccans by investigating the relationship between young Moroccans' long-term consumption of Western media texts, other communicative channels included, and their mental and physical emigrations to the West. Enaji is interested in studying the ways migrant families rely on the media of both their home and their host countries and the ways the media shape migrants and youth attitudes toward migration and both Muslim and Western cultures. The role of the media and communication, either as "a bridge to homeland" or more recently as a link between the home and the receiving country, has been increasingly vital in diasporas experiences. The chapter also deals with the way the media have contributed to the migration culture which has been developing among Maghrebis since the 1970s.

Following some of the hypothesis presented in the preceding case study, Ivan Ureta develops in chapter six (through a quantitative and qualitative methodology) an assessment on the impact and influence of ICTs and the media in 'migratory contexts'. It only considers sending and transit countries.¹ 'Migratory contexts' mean those places where migratory pressure is high, whether they are receiving, transit or destination countries, and where a practical and ideal social imaginary 'lives' and 'operates' beyond occlusive boundaries, geographically, socially, politically and culturally speaking. These limitations quickly fall away when a user logs onto the Internet. This connection permits, in a way, an "on-site migration". This concept will be a cornerstone for understanding our statements regarding relations among ICTs, migratory intentions and socio-economic performance.

In drawing this conceptual framework, the research focuses on North Africa, especially Morocco, although Tunisia and Algeria are considered as well. This context offers a privileged panorama to do this kind of research

1 Although Maghreb countries are mainly sending and transit countries it is necessary to specify that these countries are destination countries as well. But for this research they will be considered sending and transit countries.

because migration rates are very high, there is an important colonial past and the development of ICTs are among the highest in Africa and the whole Arab world.

Chapter seven closes this first block of North African chapters. Taieb Elbahloul's chapter offer a rare and unique perspective from one of the most unknown and most criticised countries of the Maghreb, Libya. It is not common in this kind of book to find a chapter written by a Libyan and on Libya. Elbahloul recognises that the media as well as modern information technologies are considered nowadays as the most prominent achievement of modern science techniques and Libya is not an exception. Their impact on the form and substance of the individual and group has become clear and recognizable. This chapter, therefore, will touch upon the values associated with the use of these means of information. Moreover, it will focus on discussing the role that media can play in the development of various sectors in Libya such as education, training, commerce, health, government, and social matters. However, since migration became a world problem, the paper will also explore the ways and means the media can play in fighting the forces behind migration and marginalization in Africa such as poverty, corruption and drug trafficking that affects Libyan society. Finally his analysis will put forward a number of recommendations that might help in solving the problem of migration by suggesting for example the narrowing of the gap between those who possess and control information technology and those who have not yet moved beyond the traditional social stage.

By crossing now the Gibraltar strait, Spain is not only the first country with which the reader meets, it is also a very interesting case study regarding migration and media issues. In considering some northern Mediterranean countries such as Spain, Italy, France, Malta or Greece, we can observe that the growth of international immigrants as a percentage of the population has been much more dramatic in Spain than in the other mentioned countries. From 2000 to 2010 this figure has shifted from a mere 4 percent to a staggering 14 percent. This indicator is a sufficient and justified cause to choose Spain as an important case study.

Taking up the Spanish case, in chapter eight, Nicolás Lorite, assesses the informative treatment of immigration and intercultural dinamization of Spanish mass media. Lorite's main research questions are as follows: Do Spanish media play an integrative role or do they lean towards discriminatory models? Do they foment miscegenation? Do they produce racist ef-

fects? Do they treat immigration in a good or bad way? Do they tackle migratory realities with informative, quality criteria or do they produce and reproduce sensational discourses? Do they dynamise interculturality or only intraculturality?

This kind of analysis should be done avoiding rhetorical or emotive points of view. That is why the author, by developing a strong methodological approach which combines qualitative and quantitative data, tries to answer these questions by referring to the migratory processes and socio-communicative transformations which Spanish society has undergone since the middle of the '90s. In that sense, his analysis is very valuable for understanding in greater depth these issues that should go beyond the limits of a politically correct public discourse.

Selecting the second case study has not been difficult. Chapter nine brings the reading public to Malta, one of the most affected countries in the Mediterranean by illegal inflows of immigrants. Carmen Sammut states that journalism does not merely observe and report immigration issues in a detached way. As observed by many media scholars, journalism also has a strong potential to set agendas, to construct and to reinforce social realities. In their role as public intellectuals journalists can help foster community deliberation about a workable and realistic management of migratory flows in receiving countries. This chapter focuses on journalism in the Maltese islands, which presents a particularly interesting case study. The islands are placed at the heart of the EuroMed region; throughout their history the sea relatively isolated them while it also served as a crossing that totally immersed them in regional events. The Maltese media began to report the arrival of boatfuls of irregular sub-Saharan African immigrants at the beginning of the millennium.

Her study empirically explores how the complex unfolding scenario brought new dilemmas for journalists: a) as they struggled to draw a line between clear public anxieties and the rise of racist paranoia that led to xenophobic attitudes; b) to determine the space and visibility given to the views of far-right and anti-immigrant groups; c) to mediate immigrant interests and perspectives. It is argued that media practices and journalists' lived experience can only partly help us understand immigrant representations in media content. News discourse is not merely influenced by journalistic professional ideology, by personal attitudes towards immigration or by the news audiences' wants and needs. We need to look beyond professional and cultural explanations to take account of political and economic

considerations that may influence ways in which media representations of immigration and news texts are constructed.

Chapter ten is the last of this series. It has been jointly written by Ivan Ureta and Annemarie Profanter. To close this book, we wanted to discuss how public discourse has fuelled in Switzerland a visceral political campaign banning the construction of new minarets. Ureta and Profanter recognize that the Swiss controversy has surely alerted western societies regarding to what extent, in contemporary, developed and democratic countries, political discourse can provoke serious damages to unsuspected levels. This case study reveals first of all, how the political discourse can take advantage of the international context to promote an initiative against groups perfectly integrated in hosting societies. Second, it will show how the results of this referendum are not an isolated event. Over the past years and especially from 2006 onwards, the current first Swiss political force, started to promote a number a populist political campaigns using, irresponsibly, threatening images regarding foreign communities. It will be demonstrated as well that beyond the degree of education, economic development and social 'engagement', a properly orchestrated populist and simplistic discourse can achieve notable results. This is even more shocking in a 'neutral' country with a long-standing tradition of humanitarian aid and multiculturalism. Finally this success can legitimize and enhance extremist political discourses in neighbor countries like Italy, Germany, France, The Netherlands, the UK (etc.,) and, through that, promote an hostile social environment within a context of political orientation to the right-wing as was certified during the last European parliamentary elections.

Concluding this introduction, the contributors of this book, the team who was involved since the beginning in this project and myself, wish the reader good moments of reflection. We hope this book will help to erode and to undermine the hard wall that separates countries and cultures. The toughest wall, afterall, is not physical but mental.

Ivan Ureta
Lugano

North Africa

Politics of Media Management in the Three Maghreb Countries: Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia

VICKEN CHETERIAN

Introduction

“Paradoxical” is the word to describe the situation and developmental level of mass media in the three Maghreb countries: Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Causes outside the sector have pushed media and journalists to the forefront of social and political activities. In the absence of developed political institutions, such as political party systems, parliaments and civic organizations, the media have come to replace them without the qualifications nor the legitimacy to play that role. At the same time, political choices taken by the state hinder the development of the media itself: state control over electronic media, punishing journalists who go ‘too far’ in revealing taboos or outright censorship continue to be practised in the three countries, although in different degrees and manners. Yet, it is the political intervention of those in power that is the major obstacle for the development of mass media in the Maghreb. Consequently, the most dynamic media development is associated with political reforms, as it is the case in Morocco, while the most stagnating situation is in Tunisia where slow economic liberalization and privatization is accompanied by increasing political dominance over the last pockets of alternative discourse and organization.

The three Maghreb countries are in a phase of economic liberalization, under the influence of the global markets and European Union accords. This liberalization is taking place in a period when the economic model on which Western media sector was based – that is the overwhelming dependence on the publicity market – is revealing itself to be unsustainable, raising questions about the future of print press, as well as the future of journalism in general. In the Maghreb region, the relationship between the market and the media sector is somewhat different. Economic

transformation is simultaneously changing instruments of domination from statist to domination based on economic and financial means. This process is creating possibilities of competition between different oligarchic clans, and therefore the reflection of a certain pluralism in the media sector.

While talking to dozens of media professionals in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, the simultaneous feelings of potential being the forefront of political struggles and reforms and continued frustrations due to the fear of retaliation are omnipresent. In Morocco, journalists test the limits of reforms and whether they can trespass taboos, occasionally with repressive reactions. In Algeria, journalists struggle while living in haunted houses. Literally every editorial building houses the memories of assassinated colleagues, killed for being journalists during the civil war of the last decade. In Tunisia, a generation of journalists who enjoyed greater freedoms in the past fight to preserve traditions and pass them on to the new generation in increasingly hostile political conditions.

The daily struggle of journalists in the Maghreb is happening while the media, information and entertainment industries are rapidly transforming. More than in any other domain, media and communication *is* globalization. It is its driving force, its infrastructure, its (virtual) image and identity. Whether state censors like it or not, satellite TV sets, mobile phones, personal computers and internet access is already appropriated by a new generation hungry for a different life. The desperate attempts of the ruling circles to censor print press, dominate electronic media and even block access to the internet are desperate, rear-guard struggles of ageing elites unable to cope with modern times yet desiring to control it. The outcome of their instinctive actions is migration. First, physically, where a whole generation of children of independence reject the achievements of their parent's generation: the secular state that promises progress yet practices censorship and repression. Then, symbolically, by refusing the state propaganda and censored and tamed media by migrating to foreign media sources, e.g., European and Arab Gulf-based satellite TV stations and multiple sources on the internet. In a globalized media sector, censorship and repression fail to stop information from flowing and lead to only one result: to impoverish national media structures and open the national market for the intervention and influence of foreign media companies.

This study will describe the current, paradoxical state in which the media in the Maghreb finds itself. It is based on over sixty interviews I carried out with journalists and media experts in Tunisia, Algeria and

Morocco in the second half of 2007.¹ It will first look at the media sector country by country, where major differences separate media realities as much as international borders, before concluding with a comparative analysis.

Algerian Media: Criticism and its Limitations

Political Context

The Algerian press has suffered the same wounds as the rest of the society: democratization at the beginning of the '90s has led to a bloody civil war. While liberalisation offered the possibility of new experiments to the press sector, the civil war that accompanied the change has dealt a blow to the press and journalists. During the civil war, over 76 Algerian journalists were murdered, a huge figure for a country that had just started political liberalization and media pluralism. The losses have left deep traces on the psyche of media professionals, and the media sector in general. No society can replace such a loss in such a short term. At the entry of almost all editorial bureaus, one can find a monument or a plate on which several names are engraved, those of colleagues killed or assassinated for being journalists during the dark decade of the 1990s.

However, in Algeria, the media and, more particularly, the written press remain one of the most independent and free sectors and play a more significant role than the one played by traditional press elsewhere. The description of a report released a decade ago remains valid today: "In the Algerian society, the private newspapers represent today the only independent organisations, with a given force, a fair independence and a

1 This study was possible thanks to a mandate by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) to study the situation of media in the Maghreb countries – Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. It is based on three missions I have carried out in Tunisia (September 2007), in Algeria (November 2007) and in Morocco (December 2007), respectively. I would like to thank SDC for allowing me to publish my findings, to Aurélie Perrin, my colleague at CIMERA, for her assistance, and the support of the Swiss Embassy in Tunis, the Swiss Cooperation Bureau in Alger and the Swiss Embassy in Rabat, which I am honoured to thank here.

weak autonomy”². In fact, the media are one of the rare domains of freedom and independence in a country still struggling with the permanent threat of violence. “The media have become, unwillingly, a centre of power. This is not a good thing in itself. It is so because other centres of power are absent”, according to Adlène Meddi, reporter at *El Watan*.³ In a context where the political parties are losing their legitimacy on the account of their alliance with the ruling circles, the print press gives the impression of taking the role left behind by the opposition parties.

The print press has played a key role in the democratisation process in Algeria in the 80s. The Algerian Journalists Movement (*Mouvement des Journalistes Algériens*), founded in 1988, has struggled for freedom of expression, democratisation and the end of the one-party monopoly. Many of those journalists were members, or former members, of the underground party *Avant Garde Socialiste* (PAGS, the former communist party). Some later benefited from the liberalisation of the press sector by launching their own papers, thus contributing to media diversification. Abdelwahab Djakoun, the current editor-in-chief of *La Nouvelle République* and a former member of the PAGS, said “It is the former Stalinists who are running the newspaper business today”, and adds, “And if they are not Stalinists, they are former members of the FLN! [Front de Liberation National, the former ruling party in Algeria]”, underlining the paradox that former supporters of one-party ideologies are today’s supporters of freedom of speech and political pluralism. Djakoun added that, in his opinion, Algerian media today enjoy large freedoms. “In terms of media freedoms, Algeria is just after Lebanon,” he concluded⁴.

During the civil war, the majority of journalists – from secular traditions – supported the militaries against the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS)⁵. Those who had opposing positions were marginalized, on the one side, by political repression and, on the other side, by terrorism from armed Is-

2 *International Crisis Group*, “Entre Menace, Censure et Liberté, La presse privée algérienne se bat pour survivre”, Report Algeria, No. 1, April 1998.

3 Author interview with Adlène Meddi, journalist at *El Watan*, Algiers, 7th of November 2007.

4 Author interview with Abdelwahab Djakoun, editor-in-chief of *Le Nouvelle République*, Algiers, 7th of November 2007.

5 Barbara Vignaux, “Une presse libérée, mais menacée” in *Le Monde diplomatique*, March 2004. Available at: <<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2004/03/VIGNAUX/10851>>. All URLs have been re-retrieved on the 29th of October 2010.